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THE ROMANCE OF TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

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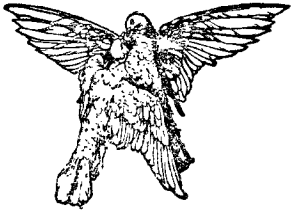
THE ROMANCE OF TRISTRAM AND ISEULT

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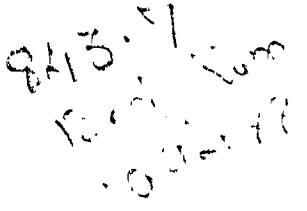
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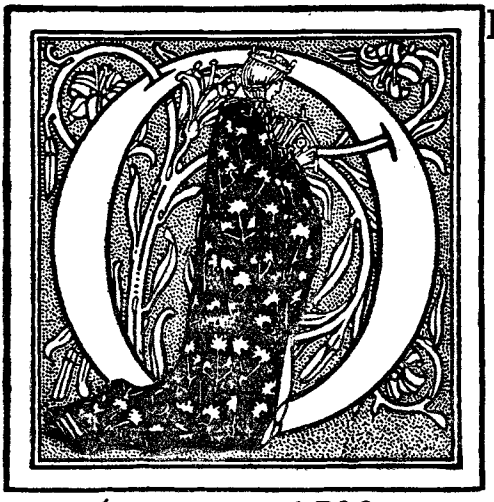







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PREFACE



OF the old romances of Tristram, those by Chrétien de Troyes and La Chèvre have disappeared entirely; of Béroul's version, about 3000 verses have survived, and of Thomas of Ercildoune's, about the same number; there are also some 1500 verses by an anonymous writer. Then there are translations, three of which give the substance, though not the form, of Thomas's poem, while a fourth is a poem closely akin to Béroul's; various allusions, often of a very valuable kind; little episodic poems; and finally the formless prose romance, containing some fragments of old lost poems, imbedded in a mass of absurdities, to which every successive editor contributed. What was the architect who wished to restore the ancient building to do in the face of this immense heap of ruins? Two courses were open to him: he might have adopted the text of Thomas, or that of Béroul. The first had this advantage, that, thanks to the translations, it would have enabled him to reconstruct a complete

and homogeneous narrative. But it also had this disadvantage, that it would have restored the least ancient of the Tristram poems, that in which the old barbaric element was most completely assimilated to the spirit and action of Anglo-French chivalry. M. Bédier accordingly chose the second course, a much more difficult one, but, for this very reason, more tempting to his art and his learning, and also better adapted to the end he had in view: to revive the Tristram legend for the man of to-day in its most ancient form. He began by translating the extant fragment of Béroul, which occupies, roughly speaking, the middle of his narrative. Having thus steeped himself in the spirit of the old romancer, assimilated his naïve manner of thought and feeling, even the occasional puerilities of his commentary and the artless grace of his style, he gave a new head and limbs to this torso, not by means of a mechanical juxtaposition, but by a kind of organic regeneration, on the model of those animals which, when mutilated, complete themselves by their inherent energy on the lines of their perfect form. ¶ M. Bédier's work then is a twelfth century French poem, composed in our own times, a poem of sea and forest, whose hero, a demi-god rather than a man, was represented as the master, or even the inventor, of all the barbarous arts, in-


MAURICE
LALAU
1903

vincible in combat, a victor over monsters, the protector of his followers, pitiless to his enemies, living an almost supernatural life, a constant object of admiration, devotion and envy. This type was no doubt evolved at a very early period in the Celtic world; it was inevitable that it should have been completed by love. I need not here insist upon the character of the passion which enthrals Tristram and Iseult, and makes this legend in its various forms a matchless love-epic. I will only point out that the idea of symbolising love—involuntary, irresistible, and eternal—by a philtre the action of which persists throughout life and even after death, evidently owed its origin to ancient Celtic magic. ¶ The element which attracted the French romancers in the story and tempted them to clothe it in the consecrated form of octosyllabic verses, in spite of all its difficulties and obscurities, was the element which secured the success of their undertaking and gave an unprecedented popularity to the legend as soon as it became familiar to the Romano-Germanic world: the idea of the fatality of love, which raises it above all laws. This idea, incarnated in these two exceptional beings, is the more sympathetic to the hearts of men and women here, because it is purified by suffering and sanctified by death. The ideal, touching and attractive as it is, is also a

dangerous one. ¶ This should suffice to attract readers who love both history and poetry. But in addition they will be fascinated as they read this ancient story by the charm of the detail, the mysterious and mythic beauty of certain episodes, the happy invention of others, the freshness of the situations and sentiments, all that makes the poem a unique combination of hoary age and eternal youth, of Celtic melancholy and French grace, of powerful realism and delicate psychology.

GASTON PARIS

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have not encumbered my work by the innumerable foot-notes which would have been necessary had I indicated in the text the many sources from which I have drawn the materials for this little book. But I owe the reader certain general indications. Chap. I of our romance is an abstract, very much compressed, of the various poems dealing with Tristram's childhood, but more especially that of Thomas in its various versions. Chapters II and III follow Eilhart of Oberg (Lichtenstein ed. Strasburg, 1878). Chap. IV is based on the general body of tradition, notably Eilhart's version, while certain features are peculiar to Gottfried of Strasburg (ed. W. Golther, Berlin and Stuttgart, 1888). Chap. V is from Eilhart. Chap. VI: in the middle of this chapter, Béroul's fragment begins with Iseult's arrival at the tryst under the pine-tree, and this I have faithfully preserved throughout Chapters VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, interpreting it here and there by Eilhart's poem and some traditional variations. Chap. XII is a very free abridgment of the fragment which follows Béroul's poem. Chap. XIII is an interpolation from a didactic poem of the thirteenth century, "Le Domnei des Amanz." Chap. XIV is from Gottfried of Strasburg. Chapters XV–XVII: the episodes of Karaido and of Tristram's disguise

are borrowed from Thomas; the rest is taken in the main from Eilhart. Chap. XVIII is an adaptation of a little episodic French poem. Chap. XIX is translated from Thomas; certain episodes are borrowed from Eilhart, and from the French prose romance, MS. 103 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

J. B.

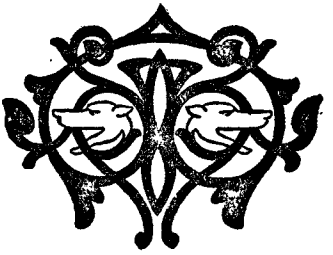
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I. THE CHILDHOOD OF TRISTRAM



Du wærest zware baz genant
Juvente bele et la riant

GOTTFRIED OF STRASBURG



O please you, gentles, I will tell a fair tale of love and death. It is the tale of Tristram and of Iseult the Queen. Listen how with great joy and great grief they loved each other, and then died on the same day, he by her, and she by him. ¶ In olden times, King Mark reigned in Cornwall. Rivalen, King of Lyonnesse, having heard that his enemies were warring against him, crossed the sea to succour him. He served him with good sword and good counsel, as a vassal would have done, and so faithfully that Mark gave him as a reward the fair Blanchefleur, his sister, and King Rivalen loved her with a marvellous love. ¶ He took her to wife at the monastery of Tintagel. But scarcely had he wed her, when news came to him that his ancient enemy, Duke Morgan, had fallen upon Lyonnesse, destroying his villages, his fields and his towns. Rivalen took ship in haste, bearing with him Blanchefleur, who was with child, towards his distant kingdom. He landed before his castle of Kanoël, and gave his Queen to the safeguard of

his marshal, Rohalt, Rohalt, who for his loyalty was known to all men by a fair name, Rohalt the Faith-keeper; then, having assembled his barons, Rivalen set out to give battle. ¶ Blanchefleur waited long for him. Alas! he was not to return! One day she learned that Duke Morgan had slain him treacherously. She did not weep, she uttered no cries, no lamentations, but her limbs became weak and useless; her soul would fain have torn itself from her body. Rohalt essayed to comfort her: ¶ "Queen," said he, "what shall it profit to pile sorrow upon sorrow? Must not all who are born die? May God receive the dead and preserve the living!" ¶ But she would not hear him. Three days she waited to rejoin her dear lord. On the fourth day she brought forth a son, and having taken him in her arms: ¶ "Son," said she, "I have long desired to see thee, and I see the fairest creature ever born of woman. Sadly am I brought to bed, sad is thy first birthday, and because of thee I am sad even unto death. And since thou hast come into the world in sorrow thou shalt be called Tristram." ¶ When she had said these words, she kissed him, and as soon as she had kissed him, she died. ¶ Rohalt the Faith-keeper took charge of the child. Already Duke Morgan's men had encompassed the castle of Kanoël; how

could Rohalt have battled any longer? It has well been said: Foolhardiness is not valour. He had to yield to the mercy of Duke Morgan. But fearing that Morgan might slay the son of Rivalen, the marshal made him pass for his own child, and brought him up among his sons. ¶ After seven years, when it was time to take him from the women, Rohalt gave Tristram to the keeping of a wise governor, the good squire Gorvenal. In a few years Gorvenal taught him the arts that beseem a baron. He taught him how to handle the lance, the sword, the shield, and the bow, to hurl stone discs, and to leap the widest ditches at a bound; he taught him to hate all lies and felony, to help the weak, to keep his troth; he taught him divers manners of singing, to play the harp, and the art of venery; and when the child was prancing among the youthful squires, it seemed that he, his horse and his arms were but one body, and had never been separated. Seeing him so noble and so proud, broad of shoulders and lean of flank, strong, faithful and valiant, all men praised Rohalt for having such a son. But Rohalt, thinking of Rivalen and Blanchefleur, whose youth and grace were living again, cherished Tristram as his son, and secretly reverenced him as his lord. ¶ Now it came to pass that all his joy was snatched from him on a day when some merchants of Norway,

having lured Tristram into their ship, carried him off as a rich spoil. Whiles they were beating towards unknown shores, Tristram fought and struggled like a young wolf taken in the toils. But this is a proven truth, well known to all mariners: the sea bears treacherous ships unwillingly, and will not help in deeds of guile and violence. It rose in fury, wrapped the vessel in darkness, and drove it eight days and eight nights hither and thither. At last the sailors saw through the mist a coast bristling with cliffs and sunken rocks, on which it made as if to cast their vessel. They repented; and knowing that the wrath of the sea was on behalf of the youth thus ravished in an evil hour, they vowed to release him, and prepared a boat to put him on shore. Immediately the winds and the waves abated, the sky brightened, and whiles the Norwegian ship disappeared in the distance, the calm and smiling waves bore Tristram's boat to the sandy beach. ¶ Painfully he climbed the cliff, and saw, beyond an undulating and desolate expanse of heath, a vast forest. Then did he break out into lamentations for Gorvenal, his father Rohalt, and the land of Lyonnesse, when suddenly his heart was uplifted by the distant sound of a hunting horn and the shouts of hunters. A fine stag came forth from the forest. Hounds and huntsmen followed in his track with a great

clamour of horns and of voices. Soon the hounds were hanging on his neck in clusters, and the noble beast, brought to bay a few paces from Tristram, sank upon his knees to die. A huntsman despatched him with a spear. Then the hunters, ranging themselves in a circle, sounded the death, and with amazement Tristram saw the chief huntsman cut a large gash in the throat of the stag, as if to sever it from the body. He cried aloud: ¶ "What are you doing, sir? Would you cut up the noble beast like a slaughtered pig? Is this the custom of your country?". ¶ "Fair brother," replied the chief huntsman, "why should this surprise you? Yes, I shall first sever the head, and then I shall cut the body into four quarters, which we will carry on our saddle-bows to our lord, King Mark. This is our custom; thus have the men of Cornwall always done from the earliest times. But if you know of some worthier custom, teach it to us; take this knife, fair brother. We will willingly learn of thee." ¶ So Tristram knelt down, and skinned the stag before dismembering it. Then he cut it up, leaving the thigh-bone bare, as is fitting; then he took the offal, the snout, the tongue, the dowcets and the main artery. ¶ And huntsmen and varlets, leaning over him, watched him with delight. ¶ "Friend," said the chief huntsman, "these customs are fair. In what

land didst thou learn them? Tell us thy country and thy name?" ¶ "Gentle sir, they call me Tristram, and I learned these customs in my native land of Lyonnesse." ¶ "Tristram," said the huntsman, "may God reward the father who brought thee up so nobly. He is doubtless a rich and powerful baron?" ¶ But Tristram, who could both speak and hold his peace advisedly, replied with guile: ¶ "No, my lord, my father is a merchant. I left his house secretly in a ship which was sailing to trade in distant lands, for I wished to learn how men in strange countries bear themselves. But if you will accept me as one of your huntsmen, I will follow you willingly, fair sir, and I will show you other devices of venery." ¶ Then Tristram finished the cutting up of the stag. He gave the heart and the offal to the dogs, and taught the hunters how to flesh the dogs and wind the horn. Then he stuck the various pieces on prongs and gave them to the different huntsmen; to one the head, to another the haunch and the large steaks, to some the shoulders, to others the thighs, and to another the loins. He taught them how to range themselves two and two to ride in fair array, and in due order, according to the dignity of the pieces of venison they carried. ¶ Then they set out, discoursing by the way, till at last they came to a lordly castle. Meadows lay about it, with orchards, and running

The castle rose by the sea-coast fair and strong, well fortified against all assault and all engines of war.

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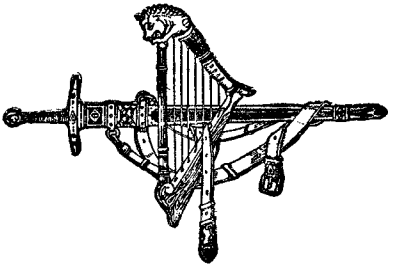
water, fish-ponds and ploughed lands. Many vessels were entering the port. The castle rose by the sea-coast, fair and strong, well fortified against all assault and all engines of war; its main tower, built of old by giants, was made of blocks of stone large and shapely, arranged like a chess-board of green and azure squares. ¶ Tristram asked the name of the castle. ¶ "Fair varlet, it is called Tintagel." ¶ "Tintagel," cried Tristram, "blessed be thou of God, and blessed be those that dwell within thy walls." ¶ Gentles, it was in this castle that his father Rivalen had wedded Blanchefleur with great rejoicings. But, alas! Tristram knew it not. ¶ When they came to the foot of the donjon, the horns of the hunters called forth the barons to the gates and even King Mark himself. ¶ When the chief huntsman had related the adventure, Mark marvelled at the gallant order of the procession, the skilful division of the stag, and the cunning of these customs of venery. But above all he admired the beautiful stranger youth, and he could not take his eyes from him. Whence arose this first tenderness? The King asked his own heart and could find no answer. Gentle sirs, it was the blood which spoke and stirred within him, and the love he had borne of old to his sister Blanchefleur. ¶ In the evening, when the tables were cleared, a Welsh minstrel, a master of his art, advanced among

the assembled barons, and sang lays to his harp. Tristram was seated at the King's feet, and when the harper played the prelude of a new melody, Tristram spoke thus: ¶ "Master, this lay is one of the most beautiful of all: the ancient Britons made it of yore to celebrate the loves of Graelent. The air is sweet, and sweet are the words. Master, thy voice is skilful, harp it well." ¶ The Welshman sang, and then he spoke: ¶ "Youth, what knowest thou of the art of instruments? If the merchants of Lyonnesse also teach their sons to play the harp, and the rote, and the viol, rise, take this harp, and prove thy skill." ¶ Tristram took the harp and sang so bravely that the hearts of the barons were moved as they listened. And King Mark admired the harper who had come from that land of Lyonnesse, whither Rivalen had taken Blanchefleur. ¶ When the lay was finished, the King was silent for a long while. ¶ Then said he at length: "Son, blessed be thou of God, and blessed be the master who taught thee. God loveth good singers. Their voices and the voice of the harp pierce the hearts of men, awaken their beloved memories, and make them forget many a grief and many a misdeed. For our joy didst thou come into this dwelling. Abide with me, friend." ¶ "Willingly will I serve thee, sire," said Tristram, "as thy harper, thy huntsman, and thy liegeman." ¶ So did he, and for three

years a mutual tenderness grew in their hearts. In the daytime, Tristram followed Mark when the King sat in judgment or rode out to the chase, and at night, sleeping in the royal chamber among the closest and most faithful of the King's followers, when the King was sad, he played on the harp to soothe his grief. The barons loved him, and above all, the seneschal Dinas of Lidan, as history tells us. But even more tenderly than Dinas and the barons did Mark love him. Yet for all their kindness Tristram ceased not to lament his father Rohalt, his master Gorvenal, and the land of Lyonnesse. ¶ Gentle lords, the teller of tales who desires to please must avoid long histories. The matter of this tale is so beauteous and varied, it would be bootless to draw it out. I will therefore briefly tell how, after long wanderings by land and sea, Rohalt the Faith-keeper landed in Cornwall, recognised Tristram, and showing the King the carbuncle given by him of yore to Blanchefleur as a precious nuptial gift, said: ¶ "King Mark, this is Tristram of Lyonnesse, your nephew, son of your sister Blanchefleur, and of King Rivalen. Duke Morgan hath wrongfully seized his lands; it is time that they should come back to the rightful heir." ¶ And I will tell briefly how Tristram, having received the arms of a knight from his uncle, crossed the seas in Cornish vessels, caused his

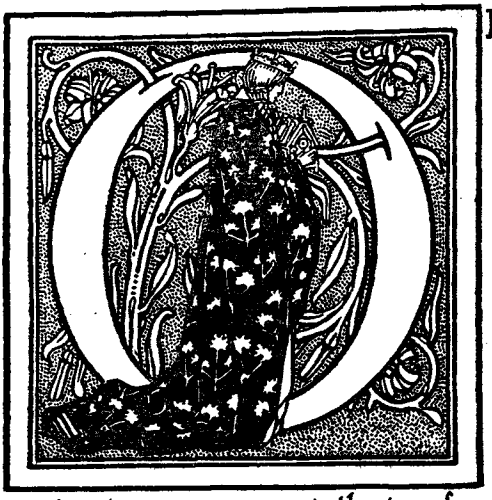
father's ancient vassals to recognise him, defied the murderer of Rivalen, killed him, and recovered his lands. ¶ Then he bethought him that King Mark could no longer live happily without him, and as his noble heart always showed him the right, he summoned his counts and his barons, and spoke thus to them: ¶ "Nobles of Lyonnesse, I have reconquered this land, and avenged King Rivalen by God's help and yours. Thus I have restored the rights of my father. But there were two men, Rohalt and King Mark of Cornwall, who succoured the orphan and the wandering youth, and they are to me as fathers; should I not also render them their dues? Now a man of high degree has two things of his own, his lands and his body. To Rohalt therefore, I will give my lands: father, thou shalt hold them, and thy son shall hold them after thee. To King Mark, I will give my body. I will leave this country, dear though it be to me, and I will go and serve my lord King Mark in Cornwall. This is my mind; but ye are my lieges, lords of Lyonnesse, and ye owe me counsel; if, therefore, one of you should wish to show me a more excellent way, let him rise and speak!" ¶ But all the barons approved him with tears, and Tristram, taking only Gorvenal with him, set sail for the land of King Mark.

II. SIR MARHAUS OF IRELAND



Tristrem seyd: "Y wis
Y wil defende it as knizt"

SIR TRISTREM



N that day when Tristram came into Cornwall, he found Mark and all his barony mourning. For the King of Ireland had equipped a fleet to ravage Cornwall if Mark should refuse, as he had done for fifteen years past, to pay a tribute formerly paid by his ancestors. You must know that in accordance with ancient treaties, the Irish had a right of truage in Cornwall, and to levy there the first year 300 pounds of copper, and the second year 300 pounds of refined silver, and the third year 300 pounds of gold. But when the fourth year came, they carried away 300 youths and 300 maidens of the age of fifteen years, chosen by lot from among the families of Cornwall. Now in this year the King had sent to bear his message to Tintagel a gigantic knight, Marhaus, whose sister he had married, and whom none had ever vanquished in battle. But King Mark had sent out sealed letters, summoning all the barons of his land to court to hold council. ¶ At the time appointed, when the barons were assembled in the vaulted

hall of the palace and Mark was seated upon the daïs, Marhaus spake thus: ¶ "King Mark, hearken for the last time to the behest of my lord, the King of Ireland. He requires thee to pay him at last the tribute due to him, and inasmuch as thou hast withheld it over long, he requires thee this day to deliver to me 300 youths and 300 maidens of the age of fifteen years, chosen by lot from among the families of Cornwall. My ship, now anchored in the harbour of Tintagel, will bear them away to be our serfs. Nevertheless—and I make exception of thyself alone, King Mark, as is fitting—if one of thy barons desires to prove in single combat that the King of Ireland claims this tribute wrongfully, I will accept his gage. Which of you, nobles of Cornwall, will fight for the freedom of this country?" ¶ The barons looked askant at each other and hung their heads. One said to himself: "See, poor wretch, the stature of this Marhaus of Ireland; he is stronger than four stout men. Look at his sword; knowest thou not that it is enchanted, and that by magic it has smitten off the heads of the boldest champions for many years past, since the King of Ireland has been sending this giant to bear his challenge to vassal lands. Poor weakling, dost thou desire death? Why shouldst thou tempt God?" Another thought: "Did I rear you,

dear sons, to be serfs, and you, dear daughters, to be wantons? But my death would avail you nothing." And all were silent. ¶ Then Marhaus said again: ¶ "Which of you, Cornish nobles, will take my gage? I offer him a fair battle; for in three days we will go in vessels to the island of Saint Samson, off Tintagel. There your champion and I will fight alone, and the glory of having adventured himself in the combat will be reflected on all his kindred." ¶ Still they held their peace, and Marhaus seemed like the gerfalcon, when the hawker puts him into a cage-ful of little birds: when he enters all become mute. ¶ Marhaus spake the third time: ¶ "Well then, fair gentles of Cornwall, as you hold this way the worthier, cast lots and I will carry away your children. But I did not know that the inhabitants of this country were all serfs." ¶ Then Tristram knelt at the feet of King Mark, and said, "My lord the King, if thou wilt grant me this boon, I will do battle." ¶ In vain King Mark sought to dissuade him. He was so youthful a knight; what would his courage avail him? But Tristram gave his gage to Marhaus, and Marhaus accepted it. ¶ On the appointed day, Tristram set himself upon a counterpane of crimson cendal, and was armed for the great adventure. He put on the hauberk and the helmet of burnished steel. The

barons wept for pity of the valiant youth and for shame of themselves. "Ah! Tristram," said they, "bold baron, fair youth, why did not I undertake this quarrel in thy stead? My death would cause less sorrow upon earth. . . ." The bells rang, and all men, barons and churls, old men, children and women, weeping and praying, escorted Tristram to the shore. They still hoped, for hope flourishes on scanty pasturage in the hearts of men. ¶ Tristram embarked in a vessel alone, and sped towards the island of Saint Samson. But Marhaus had bent a sail of rich purple to his mast, and he landed first on the island. He was mooring his boat to the shore when Tristram, landing in his turn, spurned his boat with his foot out to sea. ¶ "Vassal, what doest thou?" asked Marhaus, "and why didst thou not make thy boat fast like mine?" ¶ "Vassal, to what end?" replied Tristram. "Only one of us will leave this shore alive; will not a single boat suffice for him?" ¶ And the two, goading each other to battle with insulting words, went forward into the island. ¶ None witnessed the fierce encounter, but thrice it seemed as if the sea breeze bore a furious cry to the shore. Then the women smote their palms together in token of mourning, and Marhaus's comrades, standing apart before their tents,

laughed aloud. Finally, about the hour of none, the purple sail appeared in the distance; the Irishman's vessel left the island and a clamour of distress arose: "Marhaus! Marhaus!" But as the boat grew larger to their sight, suddenly, on the crest of a wave, it showed a knight standing at the prow; in either hand he brandished a sword; it was Tristram. Twenty vessels flew across the water to meet him, and the young men jumped in and swam towards him. The valiant youth sprang upon the beach, and while kneeling mothers kissed his mailed feet, he cried aloud to Marhaus' comrades: ¶ "Nobles of Ireland, Marhaus fought well. See, my sword is damaged; a fragment of the blade is embedded in his skull. Take this fragment of steel with you, my lords. It is Cornwall's tribute." ¶ Then he went up towards Tintagel, and on the way the children he had saved waved green branches with loud cries, and rich curtains were hung from the windows. But when, amidst the songs of joy, the sound of bells, of trumpets and of horns, so clamorous that none could have heard God thunder, Tristram arrived at the castle, he fell swooning into King Mark's arms, and the blood streamed from his wounds. ¶ Then the fellowship of Marhaus returned, greatly discomfited, to Ireland. Much had Sir Marhaus rejoiced in former days, when,

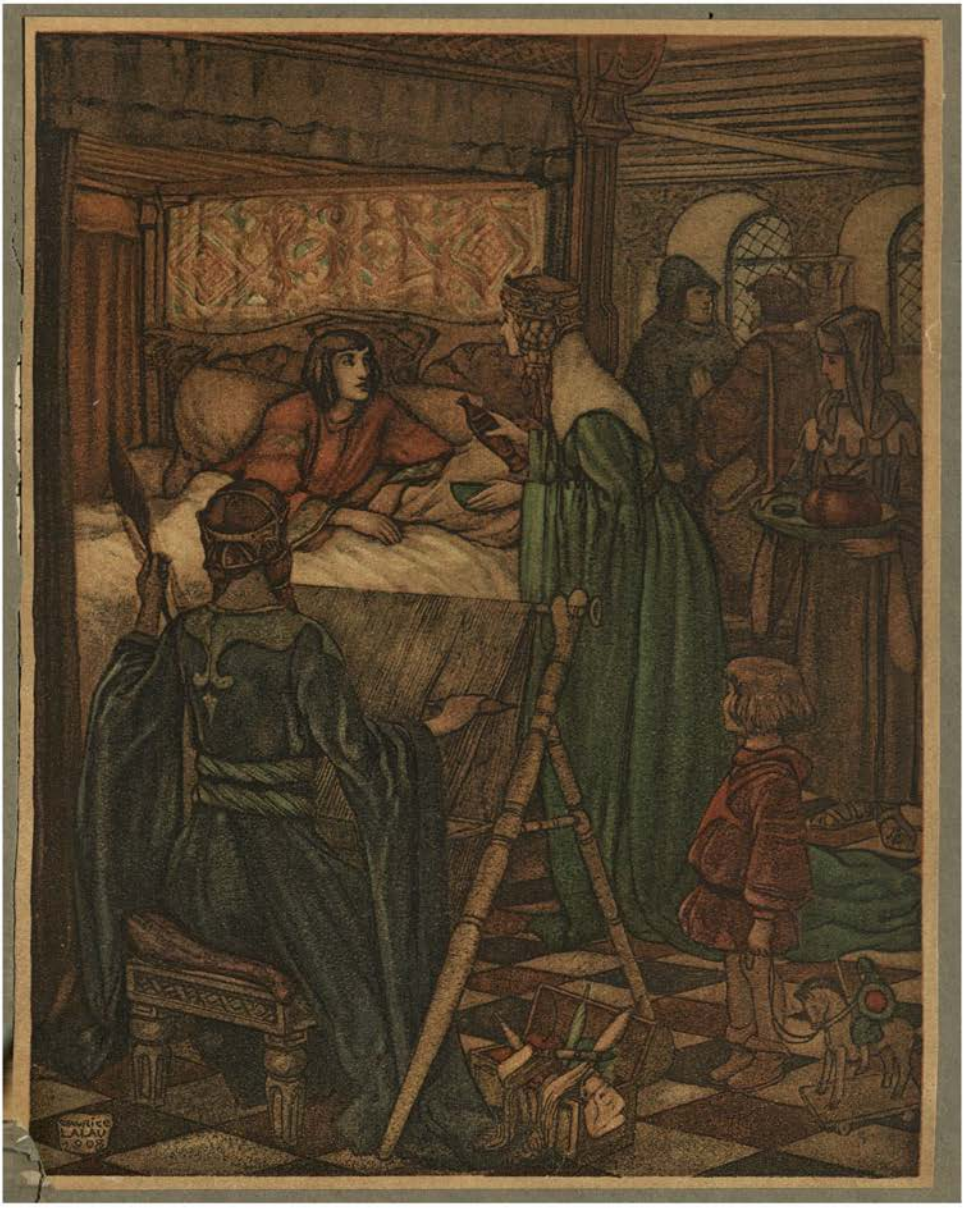
coming into the harbour of Wexford, he had seen his liegemen assembled in crowds to greet him, with the Queen, his sister, and his niece, the fair Iseult with the golden hair, whose beauty was already as that of the dawning day. They had been wont to receive him tenderly, and if he had taken any hurt, they healed him, for they knew of balms and potions that would restore wounded men who seemed already as those dead. But of what avail were now their magic recipes, their herbs gathered at propitious moments, their philtres? For he lay dead, sewed up in the skin of a stag, and the fragment of his enemy's sword was still buried in his skull. Iseult the Fair removed it and enclosed it in an ivory casket, precious as a reliquary. And bending over that mighty body, the mother and daughter repeated again and again the praises of the dead, and called down curses on the murderer, leading the funeral lament of the women in turn. From this day Iseult the Fair learnt to hate the name of Tristram of Lyonnesse. ¶ But Tristram lay and languished at Tintagel; and the blood that flowed from his wounds was envenomed. The surgeons knew that Marhaus had thrust a poisoned spear-head into his flesh, and as their potions and their opiates were powerless to save him, they commended him to the care of God. And the stench

of his wounds was so grievous that his dearest friends fled from him, save only King Mark, Gorvenal, and Dinas of Lidan. They alone kept watch by his bed and their love overcame their horror. At last Tristram caused them to carry him to a hut built in a lonely place on the sea-shore, and, lying over against the waves, he waited for death. He thought: "Hast thou then forsaken me, King Mark, me, who saved the honour of thy land? No, fair uncle, I know thou wouldst give thy life for mine, but what avails thy tenderness? I must die. Yet it is sweet to see the sun, and my heart is still bold. I will tempt the adventurous sea. It shall bear me away far hence. I know not to what land, but perchance to one where I may find healing. And perchance, fair uncle, I shall serve you again some day as your harper, and your huntsman, and your good vassal." ¶ He entreated so sore, that King Mark yielded to his prayers. He carried him to a boat without sail or oars, and Tristram asked only that his harp should be laid beside him. Of what use were sails to him whose arms could not have hoisted them, or oars, or a sword? As a mariner on a long voyage throws the dead body of a former comrade overboard, so Gorvenal with trembling hands pushed off the boat in which his dear son lay, and the sea bore him hence. ¶ Seven days

and seven nights it bore him gently along. At times, Tristram played his harp to beguile his woe. At last the sea carried him towards the shore, without his knowledge. Now it happened that night that fishermen had put out from the port to let down their nets in the open sea, and they were rowing, when they heard a melody, sweet and bold and lively, coming to them upon the face of the waters. They listened motionless, their oars upheld over the waves, and in the first whiteness of dawn they beheld the wandering bark. "Thus," said they, "did a supernatural music enfold the vessel of St. Brendan, when it sailed towards the Fortunate Islands on a sea as white as milk." They rowed after the boat; it was drifting with the tide and there seemed to be nothing living upon it save the voice of the harp; but as they approached, the melody grew fainter; it died away; and when they came alongside, Tristram's hands had fallen powerless upon the strings, which still trembled. They took him on board and put back into the port to take the wounded man to their compassionate lady, thinking she might haply heal him. ¶ Alas! the port was Wexford, where lay Marhaus, and their lady was Iseult the Fair. She alone, cunning in the use of philtre, could save Tristram; but she alone among women desired his death. When Tristram came to

She alone, cunning in the use of philtres, could save Tristram.

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himself, revived by her art, he understood that the waves had cast him on a perilous shore. But bold to defend his life, he swiftly found fair and cunning words. He told them how he was a minstrel who had embarked on a trading vessel; he was going to Spain to teach the inhabitants the art of reading the stars; pirates had attacked the vessel; he was wounded and had fled in the boat. They believed him; none of the comrades of Marhaus recognised the gallant knight of the Island of Saint Samson, for the poison had disfigured his features. But when, after forty days, Iseult with the golden hair had almost cured him, and the grace of youth had come to life again in his supple limbs, he saw that he must fly; he escaped, and after many dangers, he appeared one day before King Mark.

III. THE QUEST OF THE FAIR ONE WITH GOLDEN HAIR



En po d'ore vos oí paíéc
O la parole do chevol
Dont je aí puís eu grant dol

LAI DE LA FOLIE TRISTAN



EEING then, gentles, the prowess of Tristram, and the great love the King bore him, four barons of the court, the basest of men, hated him with a fierce hatred. And I can tell you their names: Andret, Guenelon, Gondoïne, and Denoalen. Now Duke Andret was, like Tristram, nephew to King Mark. Knowing that the King had it in his mind to grow old without offspring and to leave his kingdom to Tristram, they were filled with envy, and by their lies they excited the great men of Cornwall against Tristram. ¶ "What marvels have there been in his life!" said these felons; "but you, my lords, are men of understanding, and you will know how to account for these. It was prodigious enough that he should have prevailed against Marhaus; but what enchantments can have enabled him to sail the seas alone, half dead? Which of us, my lords, could conduct a ship without oars or sails? Magicians can do these things, it is said. Then, in what land of sorcery did he find healing for his wounds? Certainly, he is a magician. Yes, his boat and his

sword were fey, and his harp, which daily sheds fresh poison into the heart of King Mark, is also enchanted. He has ensnared that heart by the power and charm of sorcery! He will be King, my lords, and ye will hold your lands from a magician." ¶ Thus they persuaded most of the barons, for many men know not that the marvels of the magicians may also be wrought by the heart that has the strength of love and courage. So the barons urged King Mark to take to wife some king's daughter, who would give him heirs; and if he refused, they said, then would they withdraw into their castles and make war upon him. The King resisted, and vowed in his heart that as long as his dear nephew lived no king's daughter should come to his bed. But then Tristram, who thought shame that men should believe he loved his uncle for what it might profit him, threatened in his turn that, unless the King would yield to his barons, he would quit the court, and enter the service of the rich King of Galvoie. Then King Mark fixed a term with his nobles, and agreed to show them his mind in forty days. ¶ On the appointed day, alone in his chamber, he awaited their coming and pondered mournfully: "Where shall I hear of a king's daughter so remote and inaccessible that I may feign, but only feign, to desire her for my wife?" ¶ At this moment, two swallows which

were building a nest flew in at the window overlooking the sea, fighting, and flew out again in alarm. But from their beaks had fallen a long hair, finer than a silken thread, and glittering as a sunbeam. ¶ Mark picked it up; then he called for Tristram and the barons, and said to them: ¶ "To please you, my lords, I will take a wife, if you will bring me her I have chosen." ¶ "That will we do, fair liege; who is this lady?" ¶ "I have chosen her to whom this golden hair belonged, and know that I will have none other." ¶ "And from whence, sir, hast thou this golden hair? who brought it to thee? and from what country did it come?" ¶ "It comes, my lords, from the Fair One with Golden Hair; two swallows brought it to me; they know from what land." ¶ The barons saw that they had been mocked and deceived. They looked despitefully at Tristram, for they suspected him of having counselled this device. But Tristram, looking at the golden hair, recalled Iseult the Fair. He smiled and spoke thus: ¶ "King Mark, what thou doest is not well, and seest thou not that the suspicions of these gentlemen dishonour me. But it is in vain that thou hast thought to deride us, for I will go in quest of the Fair One with Golden Hair. Know that this quest is a perilous one, and that it will be harder for me to return from her country than from the

island where I slew Marhaus; but once more I will adventure my body and my life for thee, fair uncle. And that thy barons may know that I love thee loyally, I pledge my faith by this vow: either I will die in the enterprise, or I will bring back the Queen with the golden tresses to this castle of Tintagel." ¶ Then he equipped a fair ship, and victualled her with wheat and wine and honey and all good provender. And in it he embarked, besides Gorvenal, a hundred young knights of high lineage, chosen from among the bravest, and he dressed them in frieze tunics and in coarse woollen cloaks, so that they resembled traders; but under the deck of the vessel they hid the rich garments of cloth of gold, cendal, and scarlet, which beseem the messengers of a powerful king. ¶ When the ship had set sail, the pilot asked: ¶ "Fair sir, to what country shall I steer?" ¶ "Friend, steer to Ireland, straight to the port of Wexford." ¶ The pilot trembled. Did not Tristram know that since the death of Marhaus, the King of Ireland gave chase to all Cornish vessels? When he took their sailors, he hung them from forked gallows. Yet the pilot obeyed, and came to the perilous shore. ¶ Then Tristram persuaded the men of Wexford that his companions were English merchants, come to trade peacefully. But as these strange merchants spent the day playing the lordly games of draughts and

chess, and seemed apter to handle the dice than to measure wheat, Tristram feared to be discovered, and knew not how to undertake his quest. ¶ Now one morning at daybreak, he heard a voice so terrible that it might have been the yell of a demon. Never had he heard a beast howl in a fashion so marvellous and so horrible. He called a woman who was passing on the shore: ¶ "Tell us," he said, "fair lady, whence comes this voice that I hear? Hide not the matter from me." ¶ "Certes, sir, I will tell you truly. It comes from a proud beast more hideous than any in the world. Every day he comes forth from his den, and stops at one of the gates of the city. Then none may go forth or come in until a young girl has been delivered up to the dragon, and as soon as he has her in his claws, he devours her in less time than it takes to say a paternoster." ¶ "Lady," said Tristram, "mock me not, but tell me truly if it were possible for a man born of woman to slay the monster?" ¶ "Certes, fair sir, I know not; but it is certain that twenty approved knights have already adventured themselves against him; for the King of Ireland has proclaimed by herald that he will give his daughter, Iseult the Fair, to him who shall kill the monster; but the dragon has devoured them all." ¶ Tristram left the woman and returned to his ship. He armed himself in secret, and it would

have been a gallant sight to behold such a costly war horse and such a proud knight coming forth from the vessel of those merchants. But the port was deserted, for day was but beginning to break, and none saw the valiant youth riding to the gate the woman had shown him. Suddenly, five men came riding down the road with loose reins, spurring their horses, and fleeing towards the town. As they passed him, Tristram seized one of them by his plaited red hair so roughly that he threw him back on his horse's croup and stopped him: ¶ "God save you, fair sir!" said Tristram, "by which road is the dragon coming?" ¶ And when the fugitive had shown him the way, Tristram released him. ¶ The monster drew near. He had the head of a bear, his eyes were red as live coals, he had two horns on his forehead, long hairy ears, lion's claws, a serpent's tail, and the scaly body of a griffin. ¶ Tristram spurred his horse against him with such fury that the steed, though his hair bristled with terror, rushed against the monster. Tristram's lance struck against the scales and shivered to splinters. Then the champion drew his sword, lifted it and brought it down upon the dragon's head, but it did not so much as scratch the skin. Nevertheless, the monster felt the blow; he struck at Tristram's shield with his claws, gripping it and tearing it away from the fastenings.

Tristram spurred his horse against him with such fury . . .

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Then, his breast being uncovered, Tristram again had recourse to his sword, and struck the dragon so shrewd a blow upon the flanks that it echoed again. But all in vain, for he could not wound the beast. Then the dragon belched forth a double stream of poisonous flame from his nostrils; Tristram's hauberk became black as a dead coal; his horse fell to the ground and died. But Tristram, springing to his feet, thrust his good sword into the monster's jaws; it pierced right down to his heart and cut it in twain. The dragon uttered his hideous cry once more and died. ¶ Then Tristram cut out his tongue, and put it in his hose. And being dizzy with the acrid smoke, he went towards a stagnant pool he saw gleaming a little way off, to drink. But the poison distilled by the dragon's tongue enflamed his body, and the hero fell in a swoon among the tall grasses of the marsh. ¶ Now you must know that the red-haired fugitive was Aguynguerran the Red, seneschal of the King of Ireland, and that he coveted Iseult the Fair. He was a coward, but such is the power of love that every morning he lay in ambush, armed, to assail the monster; yet when he heard his cry from afar, he took to flight. On that day, he took courage, and retraced his steps, with his four companions. He found the slain dragon, the dead horse, the broken shield, and he supposed the victor

was dying in some neighbouring place. So he cut off the head of the dragon, bore it to the King, and claimed the promised reward. ¶ The King could not believe in his valour, but wishing to do justice, he summoned his vassals to come to the court after three days, and the seneschal Aguynguerran was cited to furnish proof of his victory before the assembled barons. ¶ When Iseult the Fair heard that she was to be given to this coward, at first she laughed aloud, and then she lamented. But on the next day, suspecting some deceit, she took with her her servant, Perinis, the faithful and fair-haired, and Bragwaine, her young maid and companion, and all three rode secretly to the monster's den, and on the way Iseult took note of strange hoof-marks; and she thought that the horse which had made them had not been shod in that country. Then she found the monster without its head, and the dead horse; and the horse was not caparisoned after the fashion of Ireland. Certainly a stranger had slain the dragon; but was he still alive? ¶ Iseult, Perinis, and Bragwaine sought him long; and at length Bragwaine saw the helmet of the valiant knight gleaming in the marsh. He still breathed. Perinis took him on his horse and carried him secretly to the women's chambers. There Iseult related the adventure to her mother, and confided the stranger to her care. And when

the Queen took off his armour, the venomous tongue of the dragon fell from his hose. Then the Queen of Ireland restored the wounded man by the virtue of a herb and said to him: ¶ "Stranger, I know that thou didst slay the dragon. But our seneschal, a felon and a coward, cut off his head, and he claims my daughter Iseult for his reward. Shalt thou be able to prove his falsehood in two days' time in battle? ¶ "Queen," replied Tristram, "the time is short. But you can doubtless heal me in two days. I took Iseult from the dragon; perchance I shall take her from the seneschal." ¶ Then the Queen lodged him sumptuously, and brewed healing potions for him. On the following day Iseult the Fair prepared him a bath and gently anointed his body with a balm her mother had made. Her eyes rested on the face of the wounded man; she saw that he was comely, and she began to think: "Truly, if his valour be equal to his beauty, my champion will fight lustily." But Tristram, restored by the warmth of the water and the strength of the aromatics, looked at her, and remembering that he had won the Queen with the Golden Hair, he smiled to himself. Iseult noted it and said: "Why did this stranger smile? Have I done aught that was unseemly? Have I neglected any of the services due from a maiden to her guest? Yes,

he laughs perhaps because I have forgotten to clean his arms, tarnished by the venom of the dragon." ¶ So she came where Tristram's armour was bestowed. "This helmet is of fine steel," she thought, "and will not fail him at need. And this hauberk is strong and light, and fit to be worn by a valiant knight." Then she took the sword by the hilt. "Truly this is a fair sword and meet for a brave baron." Then she drew it out of the rich sheath, to wipe the bloody blade, and she saw that a piece of the steel was broken away. She noted the shape of the breach; was not this the blade that had broken in the head of Sir Marhaus? She hesitated, looked again, and resolved to set her doubts at rest. So she came to her chamber, where she kept the fragment of steel that had been taken from the skull of Sir Marhaus. She fitted the fragment into the breach, and it could scarcely be seen that it had been broken. ¶ Then she came in haste to Tristram, and waved the great sword over his head, crying: ¶ "Thou art Tristram of Lyonnesse, the murderer of Marhaus, my dear uncle. Die then in thy turn!" ¶ Tristram sought to stay her arm, but in vain; his body was powerless, but his tongue remained cunning. So he spoke skilfully: ¶ "Be it so, I will die; but if thou wouldst not suffer a long remorse, listen. Princess, know that thou hast not only the power

but the right to kill me. Yes, thou hast a right to my life, for twice hast thou preserved it and given it back to me. The first time, of yore; I was the wounded minstrel thou didst save when thou drewest out the venom of Marhaus' lance from my body. Blush not, maiden, for that thou didst heal these wounds; did I not receive them in fair fight? did I kill Marhaus treacherously? had he not defied me? and should I not defend my body? The second time thou didst save me when thou didst find me in the marsh. And it was for thee, maiden, that I slew the dragon. . . . But enough of these things; I would but show thee that thou hast a right to my life, having twice delivered me from death. Slay me then, if it will be to thy praise and glory. Doubtless, when thou liest in the arms of thy doughty seneschal, it will be sweet to remember thy wounded guest, who risked his life to win thee, and did win thee, and whom thou slewest when he lay helpless in the bath." ¶ Iseult cried: ¶ "These be strange words that I hear. Why did the murderer of Marhaus seek to win me? Ah! doubtless it was because Marhaus once sought to carry off the maidens of Cornwall on his ship, and so thou, in thy turn, wouldst vaunt thyself, that by way of reprisal thou hast carried off as thy serf the maiden whom Marhaus cherished above all others.

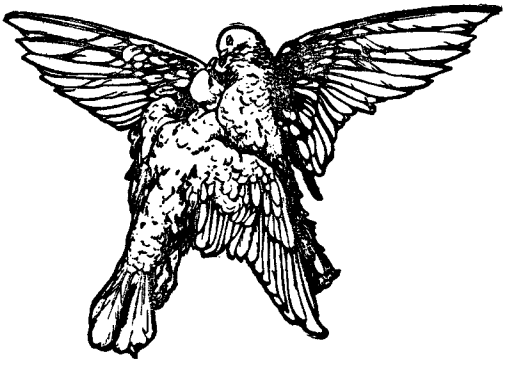
¶ "Not so, Princess," said Tristram. "But one day two swallows flew to Tintagel, and carried thither one of thy golden hairs. I deemed that they came as heralds of peace and love. This is why I am come to seek thee across the seas, and why I braved the monster and his venom. Look at this hair sewed among the gold threads of my surcoat; the gold of the threads is tarnished, but not the gold of thy hair." ¶ Iseult threw down the great sword and took Tristram's surcoat in her hands. She saw the golden hair, and was silent for a long while; then she kissed her guest on the lips in token of peace, and dressed him in rich raiment. ¶ On the day of assembly of the barons, Tristram sent Perinis, Iseult's servant, secretly to the ship, bidding his comrades to come to the court, arrayed as is seemly for the messengers of a great king; for he hoped on that same day to come to the issue of his adventure. Gorvenal and the hundred knights had lamented the loss of Tristram four days; they rejoiced greatly at the tidings. ¶ One by one they entered the hall where barons of Ireland without number were assembled. They sat in a row side by side, and the jewels sparkled on their rich vesture of scarlet and cendal and purple. The Irishmen said one to another: ¶ "Who are these lordly knights? Who knows them? Look at their sumptuous mantles, rich

with sable and embroideries. See how the hilts of their swords, the clasps of their mantles, gleam with rubies, beryls, emeralds and many other stones we know not. Which of us has ever seen such splendour? Whence come these knights? Whose men are they?" But the hundred knights held their peace, nor moved from their seats for any that entered. ¶ When the King of Ireland was seated upon the daïs, the seneschal, Aguynguerran the Red, offered to prove by witnesses, and to maintain by combat that he had killed the monster, and that Iseult ought to be delivered to him. Then Iseult bowed herself before her father and said: ¶ "King, here is a man who declares that he will convict our seneschal of falsehood and felony. Whatever this man may have done of evil in the past, wilt thou promise to pardon him who is ready to prove that he saved thy land from the scourge, and that thy daughter ought not to be delivered into the hands of a coward?" ¶ The King pondered the matter, and was in no haste to answer. Then his barons cried with one accord: ¶ "Grant this pardon, sire, grant it!" ¶ And the King said: ¶ "I grant it." ¶ But Iseult, kneeling at his feet, said: "Father, first give me the kiss of mercy and peace in token that thou wilt also give it to this man." ¶ When she had received the kiss she

went to fetch Tristram, and led him in by the hand. At the sight of him the hundred knights rose to their feet, saluted him with their arms crossed on their breasts, and ranged themselves on either side of him. So the Irishmen saw he was their lord. But many recognised him then, and a great cry arose: "It is Tristram of Lyonnesse, the murderer of Marhaus!" Naked swords flashed in the air, and angry voices shouted: "Death to him!" ¶ But Iseult cried: "Father, kiss this man on the mouth, according to thy promise." ¶ Then the King kissed him on the mouth and the clamour abated. ¶ And Tristram showed the tongue of the dragon, and offered to do battle with the seneschal, who dared not accept the challenge and confessed his misdeed. Then Tristram spoke thus: ¶ "My lords, I killed Marhaus; but I have crossed the seas to make you fair amends. To atone for that fault, I have adventured my body and delivered you from the monster, and I have won Iseult the Fair-haired, the Beautiful. And since I have won her, I will carry her away in my ship. But that there may henceforth be love and not hatred between the countries of Ireland and of Cornwall, know that my dear lord, King Mark, will marry her. Here are a hundred knights of high degree, ready to swear to you on the relics of the saints that King Mark greets you in peace and

love, that it is his desire to honour Iseult as his beloved consort, and that all the men of Cornwall will serve her as their Queen and lady." ¶ The holy relics were brought with great rejoicing, and the hundred knights swore that Tristram had spoken truly. ¶ Then the King took Iseult by the hand, and asked Tristram if he would convey her loyally to his lord. And Tristram swore so to do before the barons of Ireland. Iseult the Fair trembled with shame and anguish. For Tristram, who had won her, scorned her; the sweet tale of the golden hair was a lie, and he was to give her up to another. . . . But the King laid Iseult's right hand in Tristram's, and Tristram held it fast in token that he took possession of her in the name of the King of Cornwall. ¶ Thus, for love of King Mark, Tristram, by guile and by prowess, achieved the quest of the Queen with the Golden Hair.

IV. THE PHILTRE



Nein, ezn was niht mit wine,
doch ez im glich waere,
ez was diu wernde swære,
diu endelôse herzenôt
von der si beide lagen tôt.

GOTTFRIED OF STRASBURG



ONE day, as the time drew near that Iseult should be given in charge to the knights of Cornwall, her mother gathered herbs, flowers and roots, mixed them with wine, and brewed a powerful potion. When she had finished it by science and by magic, she poured it into a phial, and gave it secretly to Bragwaine, saying: ¶ "Girl, thou art to follow Iseult into the land of King Mark, and thou lovest her faithfully. Take therefore this phial of wine, and remember my words. Hide it in such wise that no eye may see it and no lip may come near it. But when the wedding night comes, at the moment when thou leavest the wedded pair, pour this aromatic wine into a cup and give it to King Mark and to Queen Iseult to drink together. See to it, my daughter, that they alone taste this potion, for such is its virtue that they who drink it together will love each other with all their senses and all their minds for ever, in life and in death." ¶ Bragwaine promised the Queen that she would do according to her will. ¶ The ship, cutting through the deep

waves, carried Iseult hence. But the farther it went from the shores of Ireland, the more did the maiden lament. Seated in the pavilion whither she had withdrawn herself with her waiting-woman, she wept as she thought of her country. Whither were these strangers taking her? To whom? To what fate? When Tristram approached her, and sought to soothe her with gentle words, she was angry, she repulsed him, and her heart swelled with hatred. He had come, the ravisher, the murderer of Marhaus; he had torn her from her mother and her country by his arts; he had not deigned to keep her for himself, and now he was carrying her off, his prey, to a hostile land. "Woe is me," she cried, "cursed be the sea that carries me! Rather would I die in the land of my birth than live in yonder country!" ¶ Then on a day the wind dropped and the sails hung loose along the mast. Tristram gave orders to land on an island, and, weary of the sea, the hundred knights of Cornwall and the sailors came gladly to shore. Iseult alone remained in the ship with a little serving-wench. Then came Tristram to the Queen, and essayed to calm her heart. Now as the sun was burning and they were athirst, they asked for drink. And the wench sought for wine and found the phial Iseult's mother had given to Bragwaine. "I have found wine," cried she.

At this moment Bragwaine entered, and saw how they gazed at each other in silence, ravished and amazed.

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But no, it was not wine, it was passion, and bitter joy, and anguish without end, and death. The girl filled a goblet and gave it to her mistress. She drank a deep draught and handed it to Tristram, and he drained the cup. ¶ At this moment, Bragwaine entered, and saw how they gazed at each other in silence, ravished and amazed. She saw the phial almost empty before them, and the goblet. Then she took the phial and ran to the poop and threw it into the waves, crying: ¶ "Woe is me! cursed be the day that I was born and the day that I came upon this ship. Iseult, my dear one, and you, Tristram, it is death that ye have drunk." ¶ Then the ship sailed on to Tintagel. And it seemed to Tristram that a lusty brier with sharp thorns and scented flowers was striking its roots into the blood of his heart, and binding his body, and all his thoughts, and all his desires with strong ligaments to the fair body of Iseult. And he thought: "Andret, Denoalen, Guenelon, and Gondoïne, felons who accused me of coveting King Mark's lands, I am yet viler than ye thought, and it is not his land that I covet. Fair uncle, who lovedst me, the orphan, even before thou knewest me the son of thy sister Blanchefleur, weeping for me when thine arms bore me to the boat without oars or sails, why didst thou not drive away the waif who came to betray thee?

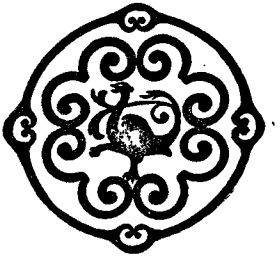
Ah! what am I thinking? Iseult is thy wife and I am thy vassal, Iseult is thy wife and I am thy son, Iseult is thy wife and cannot love me." ¶ But Iseult loved him. Yet she wished to hate him; had he not vilely disdained her? She wished to hate him, and she could not, and her heart was sore with this tenderness which was more painful than hate. ¶ Bragwaine observed them with anguish, suffering yet more cruelly, for she knew what evil she had caused. For two days she watched them, and saw them repulsing all nourishment, all drink, and all comfort, seeking each other like blind creatures feeling their way, wretched when they languished apart, more wretched still when, together, they trembled before the terror of the first avowal. ¶ On the third day, as Tristram was coming towards the pavilion that was set on the deck of the ship, where Iseult was seated, Iseult saw him approaching, and she said humbly: ¶ "Enter, my lord." ¶ "Queen," replied Tristram, "why dost thou call me lord? Am I not thy liegeman, thy vassal, to honour thee, to serve thee and to love thee as my Queen and lady?" ¶ Then Iseult answered: ¶ "No, thou knowest well that thou art my lord and my master. Thou knowest that thy power rules me, and that I am thy slave. Ah! why did I not let the wounded minstrel bleed to death? Why did I not leave the slayer of the dragon to perish in the

marsh? Why did I not smite him in the bath with the blade I held ready above his head? Alas! I knew not then what now I know!" ¶ "Iseult, what knowest thou now? What is it that grieves thee?" ¶ "Ah, all that I know grieves me, and all that I see. The sky above me and the sea around, and my body and my life!" ¶ Then she laid her arm on Tristram's shoulder; tears quenched the brightness of her eyes, her lips trembled. And he repeated: ¶ "Dear one, what is it that tortures thee?" ¶ She answered: "The love of thee." ¶ Then he pressed his lips to hers. And as they tasted the joy of love for the first time, Bragwaine, who had been watching them, uttered a cry, and with arms outstretched, and tears on her face, she fell at their feet, crying: ¶ "Unhappy ones! stop, and turn back, if yet there be time! But no, there is no return on this path, the power of love already bears you away, and never again will you taste joy without pain. It is the aromatic wine that possesses you, the wine that Iseult the Queen gave to my keeping. King Mark alone was to have drunk of it with you; but the Evil One has mocked us, and Tristram drained the goblet. Dear Tristram, dear Iseult, I offer you my body and my life in atonement for the evil guard I kept, for by my fault you drank love and death in the accursed cup!" ¶ The lovers clasped each

other; desire and life quivered in their fair bodies. And Tristram said: ¶ "Then come, death!" ¶ And when night fell, bound for ever, they gave themselves up to love, on the ship that bore them swiftly to the land of King Mark.



V. BRAGWAINE GIVEN OVER TO THE SERFS



Sobre toz avrai gran valor
S'aitals camisa m'es dada
Cum Iseus det a l'amador
Que mais non era portada

RAMBAUT, COUNT OF ORANGE

Eighteen days from that time, having convoked all his barons, he took Iseult the Fair to wife.

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EADING Iseult the Fair by the hand, Tristram delivered her o the King, who awaited her on the shore, and the King took possession of her, clasping her hand in his turn. Then he led her with great honour to Tintagel, and when she appeared in the hall in the midst of the vassals, her beauty shed such a radiance that the walls were illumined as if the rising sun had touched them. Then King Mark praised the swallows, who of their courtesy had brought him the golden hair; he praised Tristram and the hundred knights, who had gone on the adventurous ship in quest of the joy of his eyes and his heart. Alas! to you also, noble King, that ship brought bitter sorrow and torment. ¶ Eighteen days from that time, having convoked all his barons, he took Iseult the Fair to wife. But when night fell, Bragwaine, in order to hide the Queen's dishonour and to save her from death, took her place in the bridal bed. In atonement for the evil guard she had kept on the ship and for love of her mistress, the faithful follower sacrificed the purity of her body;

the darkness hid her shame and her deceit from the King. ¶ Here the chroniclers relate that Bragwaine had not thrown the half-empty phial into the sea, but that in the morning, after her lady in her turn had come into King Mark's bed, Bragwaine poured into a goblet the rest of the philtre, and gave it to the pair, that Mark drank deep of it, and that Iseult threw away her draught secretly. But know, gentles, that these chroniclers have corrupted and falsified the story. They invented this fable, because they understood not the marvellous love King Mark bore always to the Queen. Certes, as you shall presently see, never could King Mark drive Tristram or Iseult from his heart, in spite of anguish and suffering and terrible reprisals, but know, gentles, that he never tasted the magic wine. Neither poison nor magic, but the noble tenderness of his heart inspired his love. ¶ So Iseult was Queen, and to all seeming she lived joyously. Iseult was Queen, and she lived in sadness. Iseult had the love of Mark the King, the barons honoured her, and the poor cherished her. Iseult spent the day in rooms richly painted and strewn with flowers; she had splendid jewels, hangings of purple, and carpets from Thessaly, the songs of harpers, and curtains worked with devices of leopards, eagles, parrots, and all the beasts of the sea and of the woods. Iseult had her fair and

lively love, and Tristram at leisure beside her, day and night, for as is the custom among great lords, he slept in the royal chamber, among the King's trusty and beloved retainers. Yet Iseult trembled. Why did she tremble? Were not their loves hidden? Who would suspect Tristram? Would any suspect a son? Who saw him? Who watched him? What witness was there? Yes, there was a witness who watched, Bragwaine; Bragwaine observed her, Bragwaine alone knew her life, Bragwaine held them at her mercy. What, O God! if Bragwaine, tired of preparing daily the bed in which she had been the first to lie, should denounce them to the King? If Tristram should die for his felony? . . . Thus fear took possession of the Queen. Yet it was not the faithful Bragwaine, but her own heart which tormented her. Listen, gentles, to the great treachery she devised; but as you will hear, God had pity on her; be ye therefore likewise merciful to her. ¶ It was on a day when Tristram and the King were hunting at a distance, so Tristram knew not of this crime. Iseult sent for two serfs, and promised them their freedom and sixty golden besants, if they would swear to do her will. So they swore. ¶ "I will give you," she said, "a certain young girl. You are to take her into the forest —far or near as you will, but to a spot where none shall ever discover the adventure—and there

you shall kill her, and bring me her tongue. Remember all her words, and report them to me. Go. When you return you will be rich men and free." ¶ Then she called Bragwaine: ¶ "Friend," said she, "thou seest how I pine and languish; go into the forest and gather the plants that will cure this malady. Here are two serfs to guide thee, they know where grow the right simples. Follow them; know, sister, that if I send thee into the forest, it is because my peace and my life are in danger." ¶ Then the serfs led Bragwaine away. And when she was come into the forest, she would have halted, for healing herbs grew around her in abundance. But they led her farther, saying: ¶ "Come, maiden, this is not the best place." ¶ One of the serfs walked in front of her, his companion followed after her. Then they came where there was no path, but brambles and thorns and thistles intertwined. Here the man who was walking in front turned and drew his sword; she ran back to the other to beg for succour; but he also held a naked sword in his hand and said: ¶ "Maiden, we must slay thee!" ¶ Bragwaine fell on the grass and tried to ward off the points of the swords with her arms. She begged for mercy in a voice so gentle and lamentable that they said: ¶ "Maiden, since Queen Iseult, our lady and thine, desires thy death, doubtless thou hast wrought some grievous wrong against her." ¶ Then

she made answer: ¶ "I know not, friends; I can remember but one misdeed. When we came from Ireland, we each brought with us as our most precious adornment, a snow-white shift, to wear on our wedding-night. It happened while we were upon the sea, that Iseult tore hers, and for her wedding-night I lent her mine. Friends, this is all the ill I ever did her. But since she has wished me dead, tell her that I send her greeting and love, and that I thank her for all the good and honour she has done me from my childhood, when I was carried off by pirates, and sold to her mother and given to her service. May God of his goodness keep her honour, her body, and her life. Brothers, strike now!" ¶ The serfs had pity on her. They took counsel together, and deeming that such a misdeed was not perchance worthy of death, they bound her to a tree. ¶ Then they killed a young dog; one of them cut out his tongue, wrapped it in a fold of his tunic, and both returned hereupon to Iseult. ¶ "Did she say aught?" asked the Queen. ¶ "Yes, Queen. She said you were wroth with her for the one wrong she had ever done you; on the voyage hither you had torn the snow-white shift you had brought from Ireland, and she lent you hers for your wedding-night. This, she said, was her only crime. She gave you thanks for all your benefits to her from her childhood, she prayed

God to protect your honour and your life, she sent you love and greeting. Queen, here is her tongue, which we bring you." ¶ "Murderers!" cried Iseult, "give me back Bragwaine, my dear waiting-woman. Wist ye not that she was my only friend? Murderers, give her back to me!" ¶ "Queen, truly has it been said: Woman changes in an hour; she laughs, cries, loves, and hates at the same time. We have killed her, as you commanded." ¶ "How should I have commanded this? For what wrong? Was she not my dear companion, gentle, fair, and faithful? You know it, murderers; I sent her to gather healing herbs, and I gave her to you that you might protect her on the way. But I will tell how ye have slain her, and ye shall be burnt on live coals." ¶ "Queen, know then that she lives, and we will bring her back to you safe and sound." ¶ But she believed them not, and as if distraught, by turns she cursed the murderers and herself. She kept one of the serfs with her, while the other hastened to the tree where Bragwaine was fastened, crying: ¶ "Fair maiden, God has had mercy on you, and your lady calls you back." ¶ When she appeared before Iseult, Bragwaine knelt and asked pardon for her fault; but the Queen had also fallen on her knees, and they embraced each other long and rapturously.

VI. THE GREAT PINE-TREE



Isot ma drue, Isot m'amie
En vos ma mort, en vos ma vie!

GOTTFRIED OF STRASBURG



OULD their love-sick hearts but have been vigilant, it was not the faithful Bragwaine but themselves that the lovers would have feared. Love urged them on, as thirst drives the panting stag to the river, or as the hawk, after a long fast, darts upon his prey. Alas! love cannot be hid. It is true that Bragwaine's prudence guarded the lovers so that none ever surprised them in each other's arms; but all could see how at every hour, in every place, desire agitated them, entangled them and overflowed from all their senses as new wine rushes from the cask. ¶ The four felons of the court, who hated Tristram for his valour, were already prowling round the Queen. They already knew the story of her secret love. They were burning with covetousness, hatred, and joy. They agreed to carry the tale to the King; then would they see his tenderness changed into fury, Tristram driven out or put to death, and the Queen chastised. Nevertheless, they feared the wrath of Tristram; but finally their hatred overcame their terror; one day, the

four barons craved audience of King Mark, and Andret said to him: ¶ "Sire, doubtless thy heart will be hot with anger, and we are all four grieved thereat; but we must needs reveal what we have discovered. Thou hast set thy heart on Tristram, and Tristram puts thee to shame. In vain have we warned thee; for the love thou barest to this one man, thou scornest thy kindred and thy nobles, and forsakest us all. Know then that Tristram loves the Queen; it is a proven truth, and already there is much talk of the matter." ¶ The noble King tottered as he stood and replied: ¶ "Coward! what baseness hast thou imagined? Certainly I have set my heart on Tristram. On the day when Marhaus defied you, you all hung your heads, trembling and dumb, but Tristram braved him for love of this land, and his soul might have left his body by each one of the wounds that he received. This is why you hate him, and this is why I love him more than you, Andret, more than you all, more than any one. But what do you claim to have discovered? What have you seen? What have you heard?" ¶ "Nothing, in truth, my lord, but what thine own eyes may see and thine own ears hear. Look and listen, sire; it may be there is yet time." ¶ And they withdrew, and left him to drink in the poison. ¶ King Mark could not cast out the accursed thought.

He watched his nephew, he watched the Queen. But Bragwaine perceived it and warned them, and it was in vain that the King sought to prove Iseult by cunning devices. Soon he came to loathe this vile conflict, and knowing that he could not drive away his suspicions, he sent for Tristram and said: ¶ "Tristram, quit this castle, and when thou hast left it never dare again to cross the moats and lists. Evil men accuse thee of a great treason. Ask me no questions; I could not report their words without shame to myself and thee. Seek not to soothe me by words; I feel that they would be in vain. Nevertheless, I do not believe these felons; if I believed them, should I not already have condemned thee to a shameful death? But their evil speaking has troubled my heart, and thy departure alone can calm it. Go, doubtless I shall soon recall thee; go, my ever dear son." ¶ Now when the felons heard the news, they rejoiced: "He is gone, the sorcerer is gone, driven out like a thief. What will be his fate? Doubtless he will cross the seas to seek adventures and to offer his disloyal service to some distant king." ¶ But Tristram had not strength to go, and when he had passed the moats and lists of the castle, he knew that he could go no farther. He halted in the town of Tintagel itself, and lodged with Gorvenal in the house of a citizen, and

here, he languished, tortured by fever, and more deeply wounded than in the day when Marhaus' spear-head had poisoned his body. At that time, when he had lain in the hut on the shore, and all men had fled from the stench of his wounds, three had succoured him—Gorvenal, Dinas of Lidan, and King Mark. Gorvenal and Dinas still watched by his bed, but Mark came no more, and Tristram lamented thus: ¶ "Truly, fair uncle, my body now exhales a more deadly venom, and thy love can no longer overcome thy horror." ¶ But in the ardour of fever, desire drove him ever like a runaway horse towards the close-shut towers which held the Queen; horse and rider were shattered by the stone walls; but horse and rider rose again and again and rode once more against the castle. ¶ Behind the close-shut towers, Iseult the Fair also languished, more woeful still; for, among those strangers who were watching her, she had all day to feign joy and merriment; and at night, lying beside King Mark, she had to still the agitation of her limbs and the tremblings of fever. She longed to fly to Tristram. And it seemed to her that she rose and hastened to the door; but on the dark threshold, the felons had set great scythes; their keen and terrible blades caught her tender knees as she passed; she thought that she fell, and from the gashes of her knees, two red fountains

rose into the air. ¶ Soon would the lovers have perished, had none succoured them. And who then should succour them but Bragwaine? At peril of her life, she crept to the house where Tristram lay. Gorvenal opened to her joyfully, and to save the lovers, she taught Tristram a device. ¶ No, gentles, never will ye have heard of such a fair device of love. ¶ Behind the castle of Tintagel lay a vast orchard, fenced with stout pales. Goodly trees without number grew there, loaded with fruit, with birds, and fragrant clusters. At the spot farthest from the castle, close to the stakes of the fence, rose a tall straight pine-tree, whose mighty trunk upheld wide spreading branches. At its roots was a spring of living water; the water spread out first into a wide pool, clear and calm, enclosed by a marble terrace; then it ran through the orchard, between two narrow banks, and entering the castle, passed through the women's apartments. ¶ Now by Bragwaine's advice, Tristram every evening cut pieces of bark and little twigs artfully. He climbed the sharp stakes, and coming under the pine-tree, he threw the chips into the fountain. Light as the foam, they rose and floated with it, and Iseult watched for them in the women's chambers. Then, on the evenings when Bragwaine had succeeded in keeping away Mark and the felons, she came at once to her beloved. ¶ She came, swift and timid,

peering behind the trees at every step to see if the felons were lurking there. But as soon as Tristram saw her, he sprang towards her with outstretched arms. Then night encompassed them, and the shadow of the great pine. ¶ "Tristram," said the Queen, "do not mariners tell that this castle of Tintagel is enchanted, and that twice a year, in winter and summer, sorcery causes it to disappear from sight. It is so now. Is not this the magic orchard of which the harpers sing? a wall of air encloses on every side the blossoming trees and fragrant soil; the hero lives for ever young in the arms of his beloved, and no hostile power can break through the wall of air." ¶ Already from the towers of Tintagel were heard the troops of watchers heralding the dawn. ¶ "No," replied Tristram, "the wall of air is already shattered, and this is not the magic orchard. But one day, beloved, we will go together to the Happy Land whence none return. There stands a castle of white marble; in each of its thousand windows shines a lighted candle, and in each a minstrel plays and sings an endless melody; no sun shines there, yet none regret his radiance; this is the blessed country of the living." ¶ But on the topmost towers of Tintagel the dawn was lighting up the great checkered blocks of sinople and azure. ¶ Iseult was full of joy again. The King's suspicions died away, but the

felons knew by this token that Tristram and the Queen had met. Bragwaine, however, kept such good watch that they spied in vain. At last Duke Andret, may God bring shame on him, said to his companions: ¶ "My lords, let us take counsel of Frocin, the hunchbacked dwarf. He knows the seven arts, magic, and all manner of enchantments. At the birth of a child he can, by observing the seven planets and the course of the stars, foretell all the events of its life. He can discover secret things, by the help of Bugibus and Noiron. If he will, he can show us the artifices of Iseult the Fair." ¶ For hatred of beauty and of valour, the evil little man traced the magic characters, cast his charms and his lots, observed the courses of Orion and Lucifer, and said: ¶ "Rejoice, fair sirs; this very night you may surprise them." ¶ They brought him to the King. ¶ "Sire," said the sorcerer, "order your huntsmen to put your bloodhounds in leash and to saddle your horses; give out that you will live for seven days and seven nights in the forest a-hunting, and you may hang me on the gallows if this very night you do not hear how Tristram discourses to the Queen." ¶ Then the King did so, but sore against his will. When night fell, he left his huntsmen in the forest, took the dwarf up on his horse behind him, and returned towards Tintagel. He came

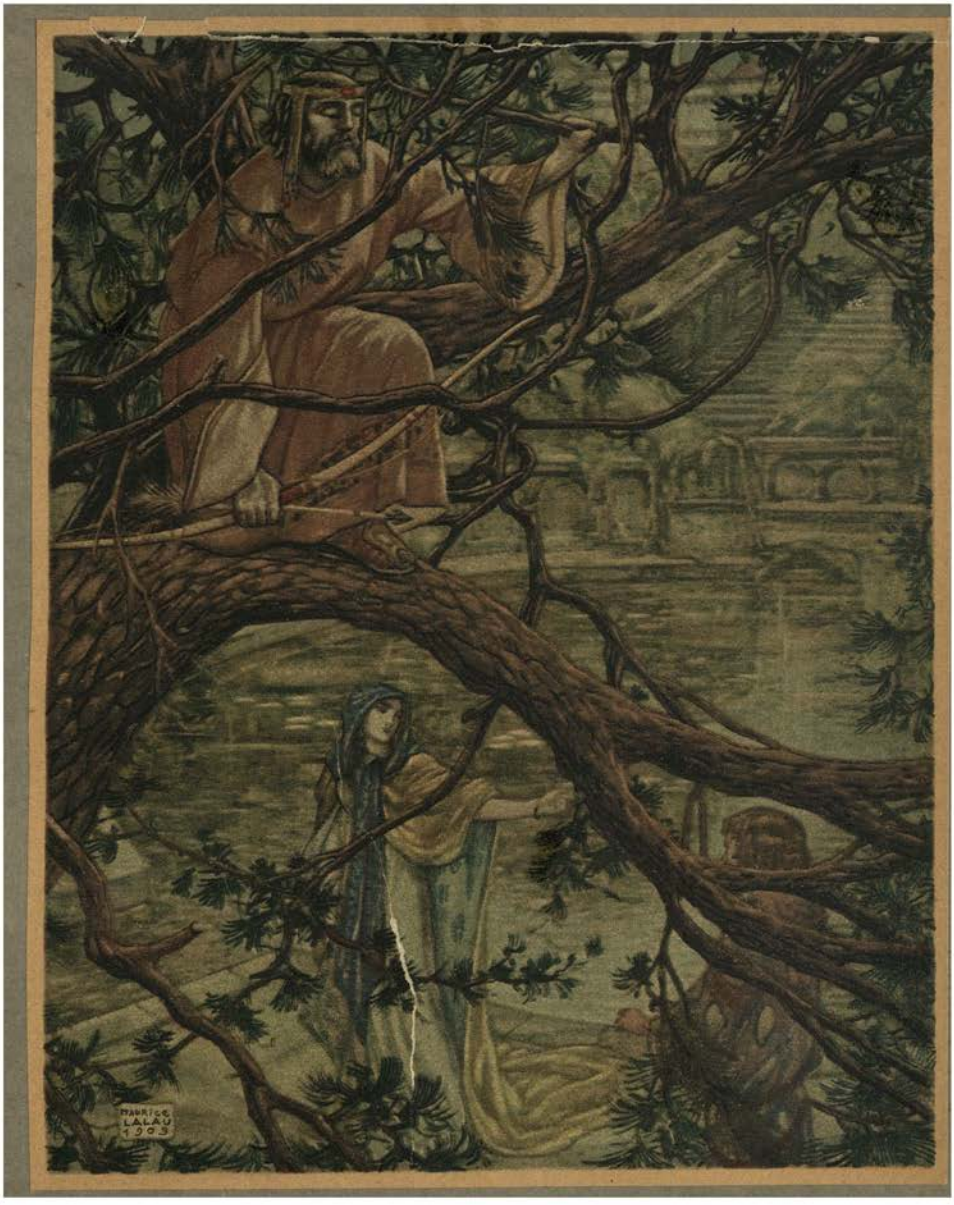
into the orchard by an opening he knew, and the dwarf led him to the great pine-tree. ¶ "Fair King, climb up into the branches of this tree. Take your bow and arrows with you—haply they may serve you—and keep quiet. You will not have long to wait." ¶ "Away, dog of the Evil One!" exclaimed Mark. And the dwarf went away, leading the horse. ¶ He had spoken truly, the King had not long to wait. The moon was shining that night, clear and fair. Hidden among the branches, the King saw his nephew bound over the pointed stakes. Tristram came under the tree, and threw the chips and twigs into the stream. But leaning over the fountain to throw them in, he saw the image of the King reflected in the water. Ah! could he but have stopped the chips as they hurried along. But they were already speeding through the orchard. In the women's chambers down in the castle, Iseult was watching for them; already, no doubt, she had seen them, she was coming. God save the lovers! ¶ She comes! Seated, motionless, Tristram gazes at her, and in the tree above he heard the click of the arrow as it slipped into the cord of the bow. ¶ She comes, swiftly and cautiously, as is her wont. "What can be amiss?" she thought. "Why does not Tristram hasten to meet me this evening? Can he have seen some enemy?" ¶ She stops, and peers into the dusky thicket; suddenly, she.

too sees by the moonlight the shadow of the King in the fountain. She showed the customary wisdom of woman in that she did not lift her eyes to the branches of the tree: "Great God!" she murmured, "grant me this grace, that I may be the first to speak!" ¶ Then she went nearer, and in this wise she forestalled and warned her lover: ¶ "Sir Tristram, you are over-bold to send for me in such a place and at such an hour. Many a time have you already prayed me to come, that you might crave a boon of me. What is your request? and what do you hope from me? I have come at last, for I cannot forget that if I am Queen, I owe it to you. Here am I, therefore. What would you?" ¶ "Queen, I would cry you mercy, that you might turn the King's anger from me." ¶ She trembles and weeps. But Tristram praises God, who had revealed the peril to his beloved. ¶ "Yes, Queen, I have craved your presence many times, and always in vain; never have you deigned to come at my request since the King drove me out. But take pity on the wretch before you. The King hates me, I know not why; but you perchance may know; and who could turn away his wrath like you, loyal Queen, courteous Iseult, in whom his heart trusts?" ¶ "Truly, Sir Tristram, know you not that he suspects us both? Must I, for crown of shame, tell you of what treachery? My

lord, believes that I love you with a guilty love. But God knows, and may He do vengeance on my body if I lie, never have I given my love to any man save to him who first took me, a virgin, in his arms. And you ask me, Tristram, to crave your pardon of the King! If he but knew that I came to this pine-tree to-night, to-morrow he would scatter my ashes to the winds of heaven!" ¶ Tristram groaned. ¶ "Fair uncle, it is said, 'None is vile save he who does vilely.' But in what heart could such a thought have arisen?" ¶ "Sir Tristram, what mean you? No, my lord the King would not have imagined such a villainy. It was the felons of this land who made him believe this lie, for loyal hearts are easily deceived. They love each other, said they, and the felons made it a crime to us. Yes, you love me, Tristram, why should we deny it? Am I not the wife of your uncle, and did I not twice save you from death? Yes, and I loved you in return; are you not of the King's lineage, and have not I heard my mother say many a time that a woman loves not her lord truly unless she also loves his kin. It was for love of the King that I loved you, Tristram, and now, if he would restore you to favour, I should rejoice. But my limbs tremble, I am greatly afraid. I must go, I have already tarried too long." ¶ Above in the branches the King

Above in the branches the King was moved to pity, and he smiled gently.

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was moved to pity, and he smiled gently. Iseult fled, Tristram called her back. ¶ "Queen, in Christ's name, come to my help for charity. The miscreants desired to drive all who love the King from him. They have succeeded and now they mock at him. Be it so; I will go away from this country, poor as when I first came hither, but at least, ask of the King, in recompense of my past services, sufficient to enable me to ride away hence without shame, to pay my debts and redeem my horse and my arms." ¶ "No, Tristram, you must not ask this boon of me. I am alone in this land, alone in this palace where none love me, without help, at the King's mercy. If I say one word to him on your behalf, do you not see that I risk a shameful death. Friend, may God protect you! The King is wrong to hate you. But whithersoever you go, God will be your true friend." ¶ She fled and came to her chamber, where Bragwaine received her, trembling, in her arms: the Queen related the adventure. Bragwaine exclaimed: ¶ "Iseult, my lady, God has wrought a great miracle for you. He is our compassionate Father, and turns away evil from those He knows to be innocent." ¶ Under the great pine Tristram leant against the marble balustrade, and lamented aloud: ¶ "May God have pity on me and repair the great injustice I am suffering from my dear

lord!" ¶ When he had climbed the fence of the orchard, the King smiled and said: ¶ "Fair nephew, blessed be this hour! See: the long journey for which thou didst make ready this morning is already at an end." ¶ In a glade of the forest, Frocin the dwarf was reading the course of the stars; he learned that the King threatened to put him to death; he turned black with fear and shame, swelled with rage, and fled swiftly to the land of Wales.

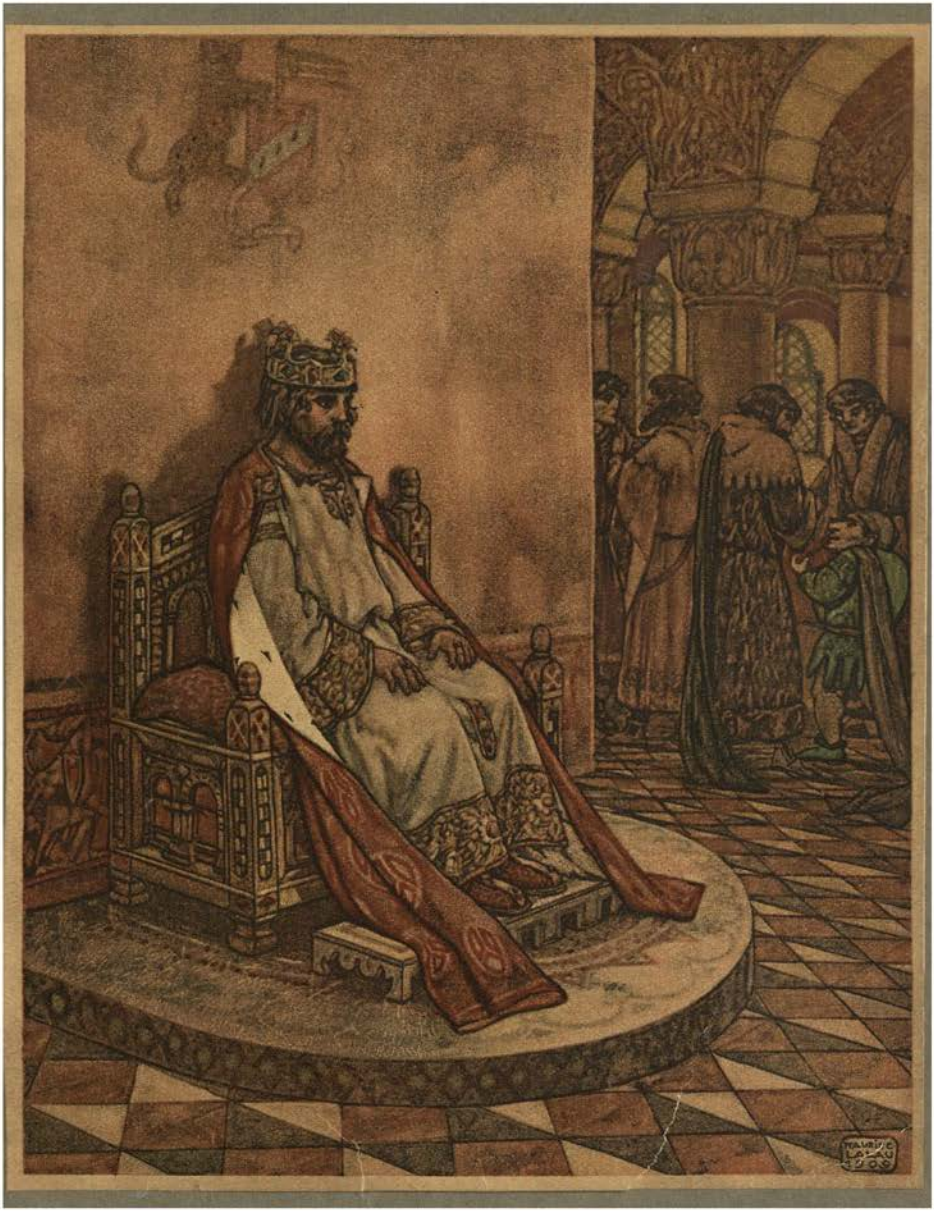
VII. FROCIN THE DWARF



Wè dem selbin getwerge
Dax er den edelin man vorrit

EILHART D'OBERG

Unless the King would send [redacted]
country, they would retire into t [redacted]
war upon him.





EAVE had been granted to Tristram to return to the castle. King Mark had made peace with him, and as of yore, Tristram slept in the King's chamber, among the favourites and intimates. He was free to go in and come out; the King had no more fears. But who can keep love long hidden? ¶ Mark had pardoned the felons, and as the seneschal Dinas of Lidan had one day found the hunchback dwarf wandering and wretched in a distant forest, he brought him to the King, who forgave him his malice. ¶ But his goodness only excited the hatred of the barons afresh. Having again surprised the Queen and Tristram, they bound themselves by an oath, that unless the King would send his nephew out of the country, they would retire into their castles and make war upon him. They summoned the King to hold parley. ¶ "Sire, love us or hate us as thou wilt; but we demand that Tristram be sent away; he loves the Queen, and others may suffer it, but we will endure it no longer." ¶ The King listened, sighed, hung his head, and was silent.

¶ "No, King, we will no longer suffer it, for we know now that this news, once strange enough, is no longer surprising to thee, and that thou consentest to their crime. What wilt thou do? Ponder, and take counsel. As for us, if thou wilt not banish thy nephew altogether, we will retire to our baronies and we will also draw away our neighbours from thy court, for we will not suffer them to remain. Such is the choice we give thee. Choose therefore." ¶ "My lords, once I believed the evil things you said of Tristram, and I repented it. But you are my liegemen, and I would not lose your services. Counsel me therefore, I command you, you who owe me counsel. You know well that pride and arrogance are far from me." ¶ "Then, sire, send for the dwarf Frocin. You mistrust him, because of the adventure of the orchard. But did he not read in the stars that the Queen would come that night to the pine-tree? He knows many things; take counsel of him." ¶ So the accursed dwarf hastened to the King and Denoalen embraced him. Now hear the treachery he counselled to the King: ¶ "Sire, charge thy nephew to ride to-morrow in all haste to Carduel, to take a sealed parchment to King Arthur. King, Tristram sleeps near thy bed. Leave thy chamber at the hour of the first sleep, and I swear by God and by the law of Rome, that if he loves Iseult

madly, he will desire to come and speak to her before his departure; but if he so come unknown to me and unseen by thee, then kill me. For the rest, let me order the business as I will, and be careful only to speak to Tristram of this mission at the moment of retiring." ¶ "Yes," replied Mark, "it shall be as thou sayest." ¶ Then the dwarf did a deed of treachery. He went to a baker and bought a parcel of flour, which he hid in a fold of his gown. Who could have suspected such villainy? At night, when the King had eaten, and his men were asleep in the great hall adjoining his chamber, Tristram went, as was his wont, to the disrobing of the King. ¶ "Fair nephew," said Mark, "I have an errand for thee. Ride to King Arthur at Carduel, and bring him this letter. Greet him from me and tarry but one day with him." ¶ "Sire, I will take it to-morrow." ¶ "Yes, to-morrow, before daybreak." ¶ Then was Tristram much troubled. His bed stood about a lance's length from that of the King. He longed greatly to speak to the Queen, and he vowed in his heart that towards dawn, if Mark slept, he would come to her. Such was the mad thought he conceived. ¶ Now the dwarf, as was his wont, was also sleeping in the King's chamber. When he thought that all were asleep, he rose and strewed the flour

on the ground between Tristram's bed and that of the Queen ; so that, should either have gone to join the other, the flour would have shown the foot-prints. But as he strewed it, Tristram, who was awake, saw him. ¶ "What means this ? This dwarf is not wont to do me good service ; but he shall be disappointed ; he would be a fool indeed who should leave the imprint of his footsteps." ¶ At midnight the King rose and left the chamber, followed by the hunchback dwarf. It was dark ; there was neither lamp nor taper. Tristram stood up on his bed. Ah ! why did he obey this fatal thought ! He put his feet together, measured the distance, jumped, and fell on the King's bed. But unhappily, the day before, the tusk of a great wild boar had torn his leg, and the wound was not bandaged. The effort of the spring had opened the wound, but Tristram saw not the blood that flowed and stained the sheets. And outside, in the moonlight, the dwarf knew by his magic arts that the lovers were conjoined. He trembled with joy and said to the King : ¶ "Go now, and if they are not found together, have me hanged." ¶ So they came back to the chamber, the King, the dwarf and the four felons. But Tristram heard them. He rose, jumped, and reached his bed. Alas ! the blood had dropped from his wound on the flour as he passed. ¶ Then in came the King, the

barons, and the dwarf, bearing a taper. Tristram and Iseult feigned to be sleeping; they had been alone in the chamber with Perinis, who was sleeping at Tristram's feet, and stirred not. But the King saw the sheets dabbled red, and the flour on the floor soaked in fresh blood. ¶ Then the four barons who hated Tristram for his prowess, held him down on his bed, and threatened the Queen and mocked her, promising her speedy justice. They discovered the bleeding wound. ¶ "Tristram," said the King, "denials will avail thee nothing. To-morrow thou shalt die." ¶ He cried aloud to the King: ¶ "Mercy, my lord. In the name of God who suffered the Passion, have pity on us!" ¶ "Sire, avenge thyself," said the felons. ¶ "Fair uncle, I ask not for myself; I fear not to die. Certes, but for fear of your wrath, I would make these cowards pay dearly for the affront they have put upon me, they, who but for thy safeguard, would not have dared to lay hands on my body. But for the respect and love I owe thee, I yield myself to thy mercy; deal with me according to thy will. Here am I, my lord; but have pity on the Queen." ¶ And Tristram humbled himself at the King's feet. ¶ "Have pity on the Queen, for if there is a man in thy house bold enough to maintain the lie that I have loved her with a guilty love, he will find me ready to meet him in the lists.

Sire, have pity on her, for the love of God." ¶ But the barons have bound him with cords, both him and the Queen. Ah! had he but known that he was not to be permitted to prove his innocence in single combat, he would have been hacked to pieces rather than have suffered himself to be vilely bound. ¶ But he trusted in God, and he knew that none would dare to bear arms against him in the lists. And certes, he was right to trust in God. When he swore he never had loved the Queen with a guilty love, the felons laughed at the insolent imposture. But I ask you, gentles, who know the truth concerning the philtre drunk on the sea, and understand the matter, was this a lie? It is not the deed that proves the crime, but the judgment. Men see the deed, but God sees the heart, and He alone is the true judge. He has therefore ordained that every accused man may maintain his cause by battle, and He himself fights for the innocent. This is why Tristram claimed justice and battle, and was careful not to fail in his duty to King Mark. But could he have foreseen what was to happen, he would have killed the felons. Ah, God! would he had killed them!

VIII. THE LEAP FROM THE CHAPEL

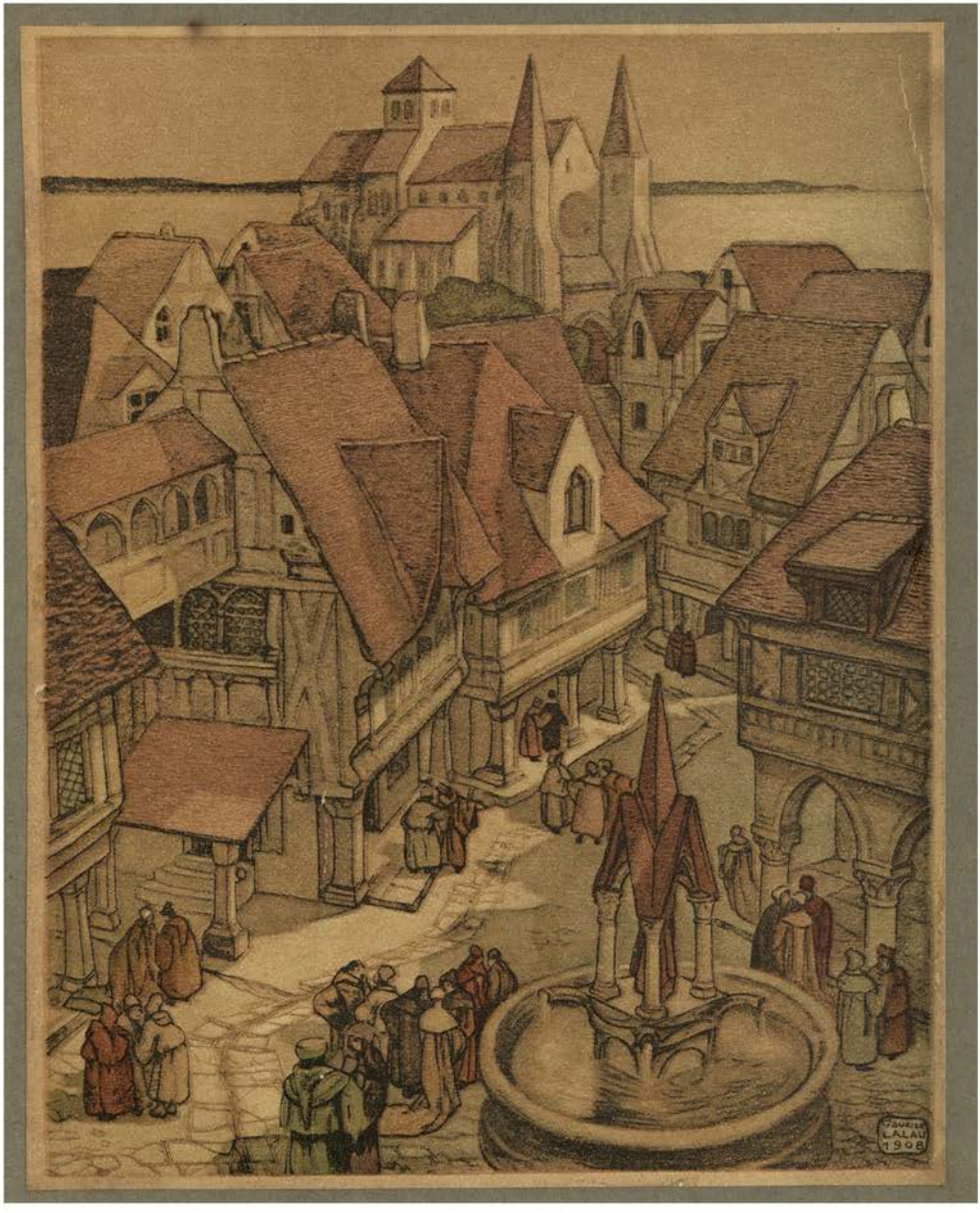


Qui voit son cors et sa façon
Trop par avroit le cuer felon
Qui nen avroit d'Iseut pitié

BÉROUL

Presently the news spread throughout the city in the darkness.

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LALAU
1908





RESENTLY the news spread throughout the city in the darkness: Tristram and the Queen have been seized; the King intends to put them to death. Rich citizens and humble folks weep together. ¶ "Alas! should we not weep! Tristram, bold baron, art thou then to die by such foul treachery? And you, fair and honoured Queen, what land will ever boast a King's daughter so beauteous and so beloved? This, then, is the fruit of thy divinations, vile hunchback. May he who happens upon thee and fails to run his lance through thee never see the face of God! Tristram, dear friend, when Marhaus landed upon our shores to snatch our children from us, none of our barons dared to take arms against him, and all were silent as mutes. But you, Tristram, fought for us all, for the men of Cornwall, and you killed Marhaus; and he wounded you with a spear, and brought you nigh unto death for us. And how, remembering these things, shall we consent to your death?" ¶ Cries and lamentations rose throughout the city; all the people ran towards the palace. But

such was the King's wrath that the proudest and fiercest of the barons dared not venture upon a word to turn him from his anger. ¶ The day approached, the darkness passed away. Before sunrise, Mark rode out of the town, to the place where it was his custom to hear causes and give judgments. He commanded that a pit should be digged, and that in it should be heaped sere and knotted branches, and thorns, black and white, torn up by the roots. ¶ At the hour of prime, he caused a proclamation to be cried throughout the country to call together the men of Cornwall. They assembled with a great commotion. All wept, save the dwarf of Tintagel. Then the King spake thus: ¶ "My lords, I have caused this pyre to be made for Tristram and the Queen, for they have sinned." ¶ But they all cried aloud: ¶ "Judgment, O King! Judgment first, the accusation and the defence. To kill them without trial would be a shame and a crime. Respite and mercy for them, O King!" ¶ Then said Mark in his anger: ¶ "No, neither respite nor mercy, nor defence nor judgment! By Him who made this world, if any dare again to make such a request to me, he shall himself burn upon this pyre." ¶ He ordered that the fire should be kindled, and that Tristram should be fetched from the castle. ¶ The thorns crackled, all were silent, and the King

waited. ¶ Servants hastened to the chamber where the lovers were closely guarded. They dragged Tristram along by his hands, which were tied with cords. Truly it was vile to bind him thus. He wept at the affront; but what availed his tears? He was borne away shamefully; and the Queen, almost mad with misery, cried: ¶ "It would be a joy, beloved, to be slain, if that could save thee." ¶ The guards bore Tristram out of the town towards the pyre. But a horseman came spurring behind them, and overtaking them leapt from his steed as it went; it was Dinas, the good seneschal. He had heard the story and had come from his castle of Lidan; sweat and foam and blood dripped from his horse's flanks. ¶ "My son, I hasten to the King's judgment-seat. God will peradventure grant me to find some counsel that shall save you both; already He gives me occasion to serve thee by a slight courtesy. Friends," said he to the guards, "it is my will that you conduct him without these bonds"—and he cut the shameful cords—"If he should essay to flee, have you not your swords?" ¶ Then he kissed Tristram on the lips, sprang again into the saddle, and his horse bore him thence. ¶ Now listen, and hear how full of pity is the Lord! He who willeth not the death of a sinner, lent a favourable ear to the tears and lamentations of the poor folk who

besought Him for the tortured lovers. Near the road along which Tristram passed, on the summit of a cliff and facing the north wind, stood a chapel overlooking the sea. ¶ The wall of the apse rose sheer from a lofty rock with rugged escarpments. In this apse, over the precipice, was a glass window, the skilful work of a saint. Tristram said to those who were leading him: ¶ "Friends, behold this chapel; permit me to enter it. My death is at hand, and I would fain pray God to have mercy on me, having sinned greatly against him. You see that the chapel has but this one issue; each of you has his sword; you know that I can only pass out by this door, and when I have prayed, I must needs place myself once more in your hands." ¶ Then one of the guards said: ¶ "Why should we not grant him this?" So they suffered him to enter. He hastened through the chapel, crossed the choir, reached the painted window, flung it open and sprang out . . . choosing rather this fall than death at the stake before all that assembly. But you must know, gentles, that God had mercy on him; the wind blew out his garments, lifted him up and landed him on a large stone at the foot of the rock. The people of Cornwall still call this stone "Tristram's Leap." ¶ And his guards still waited for him outside the chapel. But in vain, for God had

taken him into His own keeping. He fled; the shifting sand gave beneath his feet. He fell, then turned, saw the pyre from afar, the rising smoke, the crackling flame. He fled. ¶ Gorvenal had escaped from the city with loose rein, and sword on thigh, for the King was like to have burnt him in his master's stead. He overtook Tristram on the sands, and Tristram cried: ¶ "Master, God has had mercy on me! But wretched man that I am, how does this profit me? If I have not Iseult, naught avails me anything. Why did I not perish when I fell? I have escaped, Iseult, and thou wilt die. They are burning her for my sake; for her sake I too would die." ¶ Then Gorvenal said to him: ¶ "Take comfort, fair sir, and listen not to the voice of anger. Behold this thicket, enclosed by a wide ditch; let us hide here; many wayfarers pass along this road; they will give us tidings, and if Iseult is burnt, my son, I swear by God, the Son of Mary, that I will never sleep under a roof again until the day we are avenged." ¶ "Dear master, I have not my sword!" ¶ "It is here, I have brought it." ¶ "Good, my master; I fear nothing now, but God." ¶ "My son, I have further under my tunic something to rejoice thy heart; a hauberk, strong and light, that may be of service to thee." ¶ "Give it to me, my master. By the God in whom I trust, I

shall now be able to deliver my beloved." ¶ "No, be not over hasty," said Gorvenal. "God, no doubt, reserves some more certain vengeance for thee. Remember how impossible it were for thee to approach the pyre; it is encompassed by the townsmen, who all go in terror of the King; many an one who would in his heart desire thy deliverance, would be among the first to strike thee down. Son, it has been truly said: Rashness is not courage. Wait." ¶ Now when Tristram sprang from the cliff, a poor man of the people had seen him rise and flee. He had run to Tintagel, and had made his way to the Queen's chamber, saying to her: ¶ "Queen, weep no more. Your lover has escaped." ¶ "Thank God for that!" she cried. "Now whether they bind or loose me, whether they spare or kill me, I care not." ¶ Now they had bound her so cruelly that the blood gushed from her wrists. But she said, smiling: ¶ "I should indeed be faint of heart, if I were to weep for such suffering, when God of His goodness has saved my beloved from these felons." ¶ When it was told the King that Tristram had escaped by the window, he turned white with anger and ordered his men to bring Iseult before him. ¶ They dragged her forth; she appeared outside the hall, on the threshold; she held out her delicate hands, streaming with blood. A clamour rose from the street. "O God, have

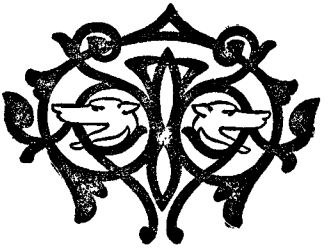
pity on her! Fair Queen, honoured Queen, what evil chance sent these men, who have betrayed you, upon earth! Curses upon them!" ¶ Then the Queen was dragged forth to the flaming pyre. Then Dinas, lord of Lidan, fell at the King's feet; ¶ "Sire, hearken to me; I have served thee long and faithfully, without reward, for there is no poor man, nor orphan, nor old woman, who would give me a farthing for thy seneschalship which I have held all my life. In return, grant me the Queen's pardon. Thou wouldst burn her without trial; this is unrighteous, for she does not acknowledge the crime of which she is accused. Think of this, moreover: if thou burnest her, there will be no more safety in this land. Tristram has escaped; he knows all the plains, woods, fords, and passages. True, thou art his uncle, he will not attack thee; but he will slay all the barons thy vassals whom he can surprise." ¶ Then the four felons turn pale as they listen; they seem to see Tristram watching for them in ambuscade. ¶ "King," said the seneschal, "if it be true that I have served thee well all my life, give Iseult into my charge; I will answer for her as her keeper and surety." ¶ But the King took Dinas by the hand, and swore by the saints that he would do instant justice upon her. ¶ Then Dinas rose, saying: "King, I go back to Lidan, and I forswear thy service from this day forth."

¶ Iseult smiled sadly at him. He mounted his charger and rode away sombre and sorrowful, with bowed head. ¶ Iseult stood up before the blazing pyre. The crowd pressed round, cursing the King and cursing the traitors. The tears ran down her cheeks. She was clad in a close-fitting grey tunic, interwoven with slender threads of gold; a golden fillet bound her hair, which fell to her feet. He who could have looked at her in her beauty without pity would have had a felon's heart. God! how tightly her arms were bound! ¶ Now a hundred lepers, deformed and hideous, with white and cancerous flesh, came along on their crutches, to the sound of their rattles, and crowded round the pyre, and their bloodshot eyes glowered under their enflamed eyelids, rejoicing at the sight. ¶ Yvain, the most hideous of the crew, cried to the King in a harsh voice: ¶ "Sire, thou art about to throw thy wife into this furnace; the punishment is just, but overbrief. This great fire will soon burn her, this great wind will soon scatter her ashes abroad. And when this flame dies out anon, her penance will be at an end. Shall I tell thee of a more cruel chastisement, causing her to live in dishonour, longing for death?" ¶ Then the King answered: ¶ "Yes, let her live in dishonour, longing for death. He who will tell me of such a punishment will deserved my thanks." ¶ "Sire, I will tell

you my thought in a few words. See, we are a company of one hundred. Give Iseult to us, and we will share her among us. Our disease kindles our desire. Give her to thy lepers, no lady will ever make a more hideous end. Look at our rags and sores. She who delighted in rich stuffs lined with fur, in jewels, in marble halls, in rich wines, in honour, in joy, when she enters our hovels and lies with us, will confess her sin and regret this pyre of thorns." ¶ The King listened, rose, and remained motionless for a while. Then he hastened to the Queen and took her by the hand. Iseult cried aloud: ¶ "Mercy, sire, and burn me." ¶ But the King gave her up. Yvain took her and the lepers crowded round her. All hearts melted with pity to hear them shout and yelp. But Yvain rejoiced, and Iseult passed on, Yvain leading her. The hideous procession descended from the city. ¶ They took the road where Tristram lay in ambush. Gorvenal uttered a cry: ¶ "My son, what wilt thou do? Here is thy beloved." ¶ Then Tristram spurred his horse out of the thicket: ¶ "Yvain, thou hast been long enough in her company; leave her now if thou wouldst live." ¶ But Yvain unclasped his mantle: ¶ "Courage, comrades! Use your sticks, your crutches! Now is the moment to show your prowess!" ¶ Then was it wonderful

to see the lepers throw away their cloaks, plant themselves upon their diseased feet, pant, scream, and brandish their crutches; one threatened, another grunted. But Tristram recoiled from striking them. The chroniclers say that he killed Yvain; this is false; he was too gallant a knight to slay such spawn. But Gorvenal, tearing up an oak sapling, brought it down upon Yvain's skull; the black blood gushed out and streamed down to his shapeless feet. ¶ Thus Tristram regained the Queen; thenceforth she felt no more pain. He cut the cords from her arms, and leaving the plain, they plunged into the forest of Morois. There in the dense woodland, Tristram felt safe as behind the walls of a fortress. ¶ When the sun sank low they halted all three at the foot of a hill; fear had wearied the Queen; she leant her head on Tristram's body and slept. ¶ In the morning Gorvenal stole from a forester a bow and two arrows well feathered and barbed, and gave them to Tristram, the good marksman, who surprised a roe and killed it. Gorvenal made a heap of dry branches, struck a spark from a flint, and lighted a great fire to cook the venison. Tristram cut branches, built a hut, and covered it with foliage. Iseult strewed it with thick grass. ¶ Then a hard life began for the fugitives in the heart of the wild forest, yet was it dear to them both.

IX. THE FOREST OF MOROIS



Nous avons perdu le monde et le monde nous ; que vous en semble Tristan, ami ?—Amie, quand je vous ai avec moi, que me fault-il donc ? Se tous li mondes estoit orendroit avec nous, je ne verroie fors vous seule

PROSE ROMANCE OF "TRISTAN"



ND thus for a long time they wandered in the heart of the wild forest, like hunted beasts, and rarely did they venture to return at evening to their lodging of the night before. Their only food was the meat of wild creatures, and they missed the savour of salt and bread. Their faces grew thin and pale, their garments fell into rags torn by thorns. But they loved, and they did not suffer. ¶ One day, as they were passing through those great woods which had never felt the axe, they happened upon the hermitage of Friar Ogrin. ¶ The old man, leaning on his crutches, was walking slowly in a grove of slender maples near his cell. ¶ "Sir Tristram," he cried, "you must know that the men of Cornwall have sworn a mighty oath. The King has proclaimed you under ban in all the churches, promising that any man who captures you shall receive one hundred gold marks for recompense, and all the barons have sworn to bring you in dead or alive. Repent you of your sins, Tristram. God will forgive the sinner who is

penitent." ¶ "Repent, Sir Ogrin? of what crime? You who judge us, do you know of the potion we drank on the sea? Yes, that goodly draught intoxicates us, and I would rather beg on the high road all my life long, and live on herbs and roots with Iseult, than be king of a fair kingdom without her." ¶ "Sir Tristram, then may God help you, for you have lost both this world and the next. It is ordained that the traitor to his lord should be torn in pieces by horses, and burnt; where his ashes fall no grass will grow henceforth, and the ground is ploughed in vain; trees and grass wither and die there. Tristram, give back the Queen to him who espoused her according to the law of Rome." ¶ "She is his no longer; he gave her to his lepers. It was from the lepers that I took her. Henceforth she is mine; I cannot part from her, nor she from me." ¶ Ogrin had seated himself; at his feet Iseult was weeping, her head on the knees of the man who suffered for God. The hermit repeated the holy words of the Book to her; but she shook her head, weeping, and refused to believe. ¶ "Alas!" said Ogrin, "what comfort can I give to these dead? Repent, Tristram, for he who lives in sin without repentance is dead." ¶ "No, I live and I repent not. We will return to the forest which guards and protects us. Come, Iseult, beloved." ¶ Iseult rose,

and they clasped hands. They stepped into the high grasses and heather; the trees closed their branches over them; they disappeared behind the foliage. ¶ Now listen, gentles, to a fair adventure. Tristram had reared a fine hound, swift and eager in the chase; neither king nor baron had his like for hunting with the bow. He was called Husdent. They had been obliged to shut him up in the donjon with a log hung about his neck. From the day he had missed his master, he had refused all food, and he ceased not to scratch the ground, to weep and to howl. Many had pity on him. ¶ "Husdent," said they, "no beast has ever loved so truly as thou; well did Solomon say: 'My true friend is my hound.'" ¶ And King Mark, remembering the days of yore, thought in his heart: "The dog shows his good sense when he laments his lord thus; for where in all Cornwall is there one to equal Tristram?" ¶ Then three barons came to the King. ¶ "Sire, cause Husdent to be loosed; we shall see if he grieves thus for the loss of his master. If not you will see how, directly he is free, he will rush upon men and beasts with open jaws and outstretched tongue, to bite them." ¶ So he was unbound. He sprang through the doorway and rushed to the chamber where he was wont to find Tristram. He growled, whined, sniffed about, and finally found his master's scent.

Then he followed step by step the road Tristram had taken to the pyre. Every one followed him. He barked loudly and began to climb towards the cliff. Then he entered the chapel and sprang upon the altar; suddenly he leapt out of the window, fell to the base of the rock, picked up the scent again on the beach, halted for a moment in the flowery wood where Tristram had lain ambushed, and then set out for the forest. All who saw him pitied him. "Fair King," then said the knights, "let us follow him no farther; he might lead us to a place whence it would be difficult to return." ¶ So they left him and went back. In the forest the dog gave tongue, and his baying resounded among the trees. Tristram, the Queen, and Gorvenal heard him from afar. "It is Husdent." They were alarmed. Surely the King was pursuing them, and sent hounds to seize them like wild beasts . . . They crept into a thicket. Tristram waited at the outskirts, his bow strung. But when Husdent saw and recognised his lord, he bounded towards him, shaking his head and his tail, curving his backbone, and rolling himself into a ball. Did ever beast show such joy? Then he ran to Iseult the Fair, to Gorvenal, and even greeted the horse. Tristram felt sorry for him. ¶ "Alas! what evil chance brought him to us! What can a hunted man do with this dog, which cannot keep quiet?

The King is tracking us over plains and woods, throughout his dominions; Husdent will betray us by his barking. Ah! it is his love and his noble nature that lead him to his death. Yet must we safeguard ourselves. What shall I do? Counsel me." ¶ Iseult caressed Husdent and said: ¶ "Sir, spare him! I have heard tell of a Welsh forester who taught his dog to follow the bloody tracks of wounded stags without barking. Dear Tristram, what joy it would be for us if, by dint of patience, we could train Husdent thus." ¶ He considered for a moment, while the dog was licking Iseult's hands. Tristram had pity on him and said: ¶ "I will try. It would be too hard to kill him." ¶ Presently Tristram gave chase, dislodged a roe-buck, and wounded it with an arrow. The dog essayed to rush in pursuit of the roe, barking so loudly that the woods resounded. Tristram silenced him by beating him. Husdent raised his head to his master in astonishment, and not daring to bark again, he gave up the chase. Tristram put him under him, then slashed his boot with his switch of chestnut wood, as huntsmen do to excite their hounds. At this signal Husdent began to bark again, and once more Tristram chastised him. Teaching him thus, by the end of a month he had trained him to hunt in silence; when his arrow had wounded a stag or a roe, Husdent followed

the tracks on snow, ice, or grass without uttering a sound. If he came up with the game in the forest, he marked the place by bringing branches to it; if he caught it on the heath, he piled grass on the body, and came back without a sound to fetch his master. ¶ The summer passed, and winter came. The lovers lived crouching in the hollow of a rock, and icicles bristled about their couch of dead leaves spread on the frozen ground. But the strength of their love made them unconscious of their misery. ¶ When the fair weather returned, they built their bower of green branches again under the great trees. From his childhood, Tristram had been able to imitate the songs of wood-birds; he could at will counterfeit the goldfinch, the tit, the nightingale, and all the feathered folk; sometimes many birds which had come at his call sat among the branches of the hut, singing their lays with swelling throats in the sunshine. ¶ The lovers no longer fled through the forest as wanderers; for none of the barons dared to follow them, knowing that Tristram would have hung them from the branches of the trees. But one day, one of the four traitors, Guenelon (cursed be he of God!), borne away by the ardour of the chase, dared to venture near Morois. That morning Gorvenal had taken the saddle off his steed and was pasturing him on the new grass in the hollow of a ravine on the confines of the

The lovers lived crouching in the hollow of a rock . . .

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MAURICE
LALAU
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forest; a little farther off, in the bower of branches, Tristram lay with the Queen in his arms on the flower-strewn ground, and both slept soundly. ¶ Suddenly, Gorvenal heard the noise of a pack of hounds; the hounds were in full cry after a stag, which sprang into the ravine. On the plain in the distance appeared a hunter; Gorvenal recognised him; it was Guenelon, the man his lord hated above all others. Alone, without a squire, spurring the bleeding flanks of his horse and lashing his neck, he galloped forward. Lurking behind a tree, Gorvenal watched him; he comes swiftly; it will take him longer to return. ¶ He passes. Gorvenal springs from his ambush, seizes the bridle, and, recalling in this moment all the evil wrought by the man, he strikes him down, dismembers him, and goes away, carrying the severed head with him. ¶ In the forest on the flower-strewn floor of the hut Tristram and the Queen slumbered in each other's arms. Gorvenal came thither noiselessly, the dead man's head in his hand. ¶ When the huntsmen found the headless trunk under the tree, they fled in terror, fearing death, as if Tristram were pursuing them. Thereafter, none ever came hunting in that wood. ¶ Gorvenal fastened the head by the hair to the fork of the hut, to rejoice his lord's heart at his awakening; the thick foliage encircled it. ¶ Tristram awoke, and saw the head looking at

him, half hidden by the leaves. He recognised Guenelon, and sprang to his feet in alarm. But his master cried: ¶ "Fear not, he is dead. I slew him with this sword. Son, was he not thine enemy?" ¶ And Tristram rejoiced: Guenelon whom he hated was slain. ¶ Thenceforth none dared to enter that wild forest; Fear stood sentinel at its openings, and the lovers were its lords. It was then that Tristram fashioned the bow Qui-ne-faut, which never failed to hit the mark, man or beast, at the spot aimed at. ¶ Gentles, it was a summer's day at the time of hay harvest, soon after Whitsuntide, and the birds were singing in the dew, of the approaching dawn. Tristram came out of the hut, girded on his sword, prepared the bow Qui-ne-faut, and went alone to hunt in the forest. Before night fell, a great misadventure befell him. Never did lovers love so much, and suffer so greatly for their fault. ¶ When Tristram came back from the chase, overcome by the heat, he took the Queen in his arms. ¶ "Beloved, where hast thou been?" ¶ "Chasing a stag which has wearied me. See, the sweat runs from my limbs; I would lie down and sleep." ¶ Beneath the bower of green branches, Iseult lay down first on the fresh strewn grass, Tristram stretched himself beside her, and placed his naked sword between their bodies. Happily, they kept on their garments. The Queen had on

her finger the gold ring set with fair emeralds which King Mark had given her on their wedding-day; her hand had become so thin that the ring would scarcely keep on it. They were sleeping thus in a close embrace, one of Tristram's arms under his beloved's neck, the other over her fair body, but their lips were not touching. There was not a breath of wind, not a leaf trembled. Through the leafy roof, a sunbeam fell upon the face of Iseult, which gleamed like an icicle. ¶ Now a forester had noted in the wood a place where the grass was trampled. The lovers had slept there the day before; but not recognising the impress of their bodies, he followed the track and came to their lodging. He saw them sleeping, recognised them and fled, fearing Tristram's fierce awakening. He fled to Tintagel, two leagues thence, and came to the King, who was holding a court of justice among his assembled vassals. ¶ "Friend, what seekest thou here, breathless as I see thee? Thou art even as a tender of hounds who has been long running after the dogs. Hast thou also come to complain of some wrong done to thee? Who hath driven thee from my forest?" ¶ Then the forester took him aside, and said in his ear: ¶ "I have seen Tristram and the Queen. They were sleeping, and terror seized me." ¶ "Where was the place?" ¶ "In a hut in the Morois. They

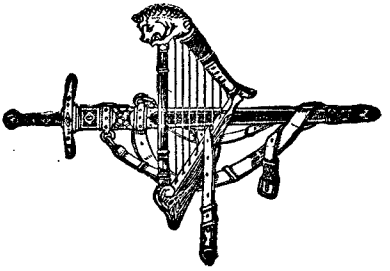
were sleeping in each other's arms. Come quickly, if thou wouldst take vengeance. ¶ "Go and wait for me at the entrance to the wood, at the foot of the Red Cross. Speak to none of what thou hast seen. I will give thee gold and silver, as much as thou wilt." ¶ The forester departed and seated himself under the Red Cross. Curses on the spy! But he died shamefully, as this history will tell anon. ¶ The King caused his horse to be saddled, girded on his sword, and stole away from the city, riding alone. And as he rode he thought of the night when he had seized his nephew; what tenderness Iseult the Fair, the bright-faced, had shown for Tristram! If he should surprise them again, he would punish these evil-doers, he would be avenged on those who had shamed him. . . . ¶ At the Red Cross he found the forester. ¶ "Go in front; lead me straight and swiftly." ¶ The black shadow of the great trees wrapt them about. The King followed the spy. He trusts to his sword, which has dealt many a valiant blow in the past. "Ah! if Tristram should wake, one of the two, God knoweth which, will not leave the spot alive. At last the forester whispered: ¶ "King, we are approaching." ¶ He held his stirrup, and tied the horse's reins to the branches of a green apple-tree. Then they drew nearer, till suddenly, in a

sunny glade, they saw the flower-decked hut. ¶ Then the King unfastened the golden clasps of his mantle, and threw it off, and his handsome body appeared. He drew his sword from the sheath, and said once more in his heart that he would either die or kill them both. The forester followed him; he made him a sign to go back. ¶ Alone he entered the hut, brandishing his naked sword. . . . Ah! what mourning will there be if this stroke goes home. But he noted that their lips were not touching each other, and that a naked sword lay between their bodies. ¶ "God!" said he, "what do I see? Must I indeed slay them? Living in this wood as they have done for so long, would they, if they loved madly, have laid this naked sword between them? And is it not known of all that a naked blade, separating two bodies, is the gage and guardian of chastity. If they loved with a guilty love, would they be resting thus chastely? No, I will not slay them; it would be a sin to strike them; and if I should wake this sleeper, and one of us two should be slain, there would be much talk of the matter, to our shame. But I will so do that on waking they may know that I found them asleep, that I did not desire their death, and that God has had pity on them." ¶ The sun, piercing the boughs of the bower, shone hot on the white

face of Iseult; the King took his ermine-trimmed gloves: ¶ "It was she," he said, "who brought them to me from Ireland! . . ." He thrust them among the foliage to fill up the hole through which the sunbeam fell; then he gently drew off the emerald ring he had given the Queen; once he had had to force it a little to get it on her finger, but now her hand was so thin that the ring slipped off easily; in its place, the King put the ring Iseult had given him of yore. Then he took the sword that lay between the lovers—he recognised it as the one a splinter of which had been left in the skull of Marhaus—put his own in its place, came out of the bower, sprang into his saddle, and said to the forester: ¶ "Fly now, and save thy skin, if thou canst." ¶ Now Iseult had a dream as she slept: she was in a splendid tent, in the midst of a great forest. Two lions sprang upon her and fought for her . . . She uttered a cry and woke; the ermine-trimmed gloves fell upon her breast. At the cry, Tristram sprang to his feet, snatched at his sword, and recognised that of the King by its golden hilt. And the Queen saw Mark's ring on her finger. She cried: ¶ "Sir, woe to us! The King has tracked us." ¶ "Yes," said Tristram, "he has taken away my sword; he was alone, he was afraid, he has gone to fetch help; he will come back, and have us burnt in the sight

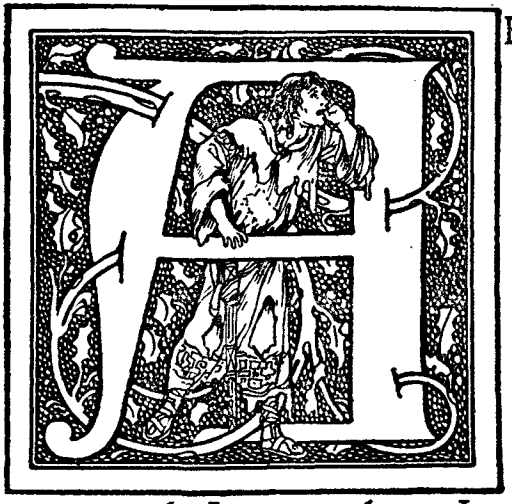
of the people. Let us fly." ¶ Accompanied by Gorvenal, they fled, travelling all day, towards Wales, even to the confines of the forest. What pains did they suffer for love!

X. THE HERMIT OGRIN



Aspre vie meinent et dure
Tant s'entraiment de bone amor
L'uns vor l'autre ne sent dolor

BÉROUL



FTER three days, when Tristram had long followed the tracks of a wounded stag, night came on, and he began to ponder in the dark wood: ¶ "No, it was not by reason of fear that the King spared us. He had taken my sword, I was asleep, I was at his mercy, he might have struck; what need had he of help? And if he wished to take me alive, why, having disarmed me, should he have left me his own sword? Ah! I know thee, my father! It was not fear, but pity and love that moved thee to pardon us? To pardon? Who could overlook such a crime without abasing himself? No, he did not pardon, but he understood. He knew that at the stake, in the leap from the chapel, in the ambush against the lepers, God had us in His keeping. Then he remembered the boy who once sat harping at his feet, and how I had left my land of Lyonnesse for him, and Marhaus' spear-head, and the blood I shed for his honour. He remembered that I did not plead guilty, but that I vainly demanded judgment, justice, and battle, and his noble

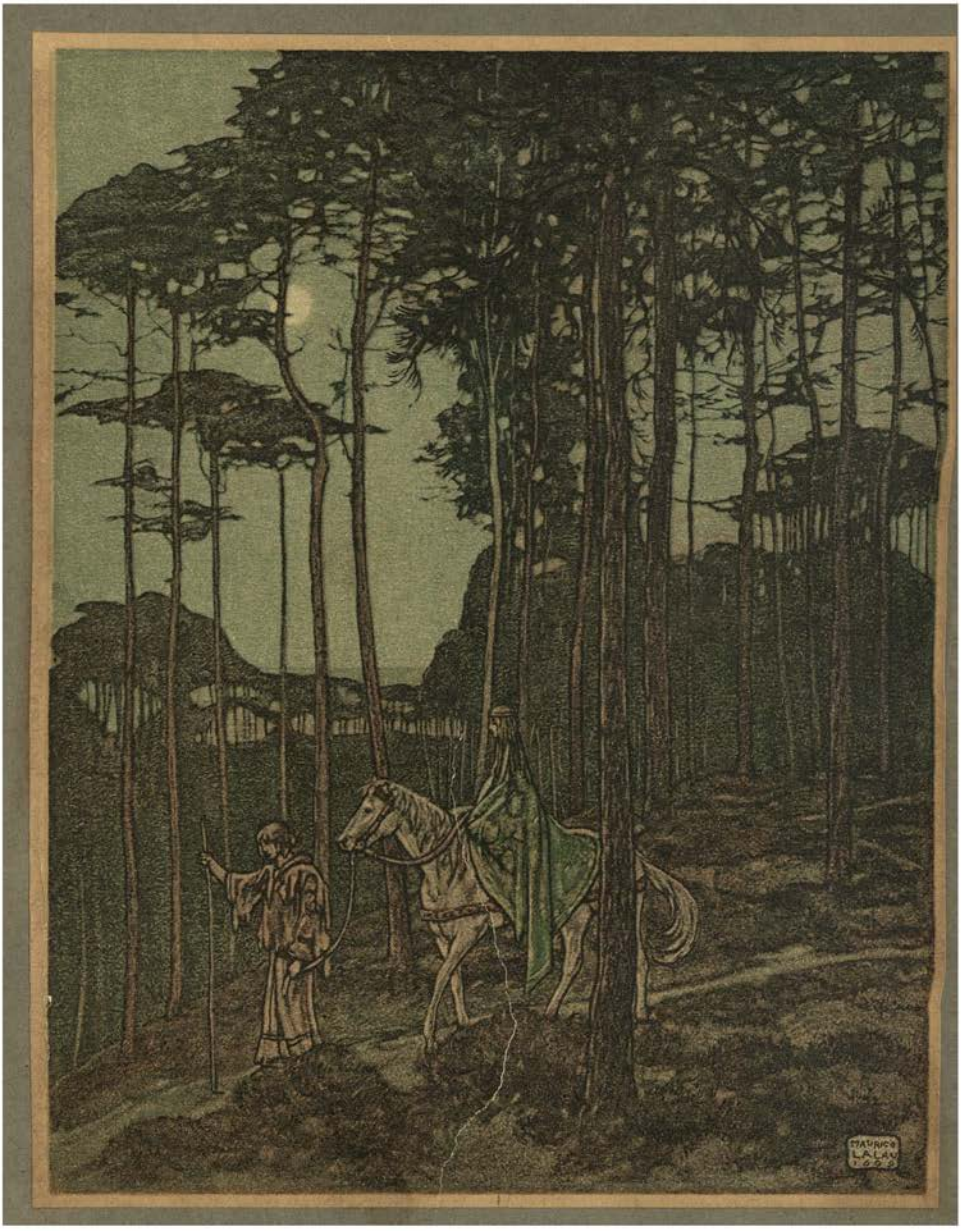
heart inclined him to understand things that those around him cannot understand; not that he knows or can ever know the truth of our love; but he doubts, he hopes, he knows that I did not lie, he wishes me to prove my right in battle. Ah! fair uncle, might I but be the victor in battle by God's help, and don hauberk and helmet once more for thee! What am I saying? He would take back Iseult; I should give her up to him? Why did he not rather slay me as I slept? Formerly, when I was hunted down by him, I could hate him and forget him; he gave Iseult to the lepers; she was his no longer, she was mine. Now by his compassion he has revived my affection and won back the Queen. The Queen? Yes, with him she was a queen, and here in the forest she lives like a serf. What have I done with her youth? Instead of chambers with silken hangings, I give her this wild forest; a hut instead of her costly tapestries; and it is for me that she travels this harsh road. To the Lord God, King of the World, I cry for mercy, and I pray Him to give me strength to give back Iseult to Mark. Is she not his wife, espoused according to the laws of Rome, before all the great men of his kingdom?" ¶ And Tristram leant on his bow, and wept and lamented in the darkness. ¶ In the thorn-encircled thicket which served them for shelter, Iseult the Fair awaited Tristram's return.

By the light of a moonbeam, she saw the gleam of the gold ring King Mark had slipped on her finger. She thought: ¶ "He who gave me this gold ring of his fair courtesy is not the angry husband who cast me to the lepers; no, he is the tender lord who from the day I landed on his shores received me and protected me. How he loved Tristram! But I came, and what have I done? Ought not Tristram to be living in the King's palace, with a hundred damoiseaux around him to be his retinue and serve him that they may become armed knights? Ought he not to be riding forth to courts and throughout baronies, seeking combats and adventures? But for my sake he forgets all chivalry, exiled from the court, hunted like a wild beast in this forest, leading this wild life." ¶ She heard Tristram's footsteps among the leaves and the dead branches, and she came out, as was her wont, to meet him and relieve him of his arms. She took the bow Qui-ne-faut from his hand, and his arrows, and unfastened the buckles of his sword. ¶ "Beloved," said Tristram, "this is the sword of King Mark. It should have slain, but it spared us." ¶ Iseult took the sword and kissed the golden hilt, and Tristram saw that she was weeping. ¶ "Beloved," he said, "could I but make peace with the King! would he but suffer me to maintain in battle that never by word or deed have I offered

you a guilty love, every knight of his kingdom, from Lidan to Durham, who should dare to say otherwise should find me ready to meet him in the lists. Then, if the King would consent to keep me in his retinue, I would serve him honourably, as my lord and father; and if he chose rather to keep you and to send me away, I would go to Frisia or to Brittany with Gorvenal as my sole companion. But wheresoever I go, Queen, and always, I shall be yours. Iseult, I would not think of this separation, but for the miseries you have so long endured for me, fair one, in this wild region." ¶ "Tristram, remember the hermit Ogrin in his grove. Let us return to him, and let us cry to the mighty King of Heaven for mercy, beloved." ¶ Then they roused Gorvenal; Iseult mounted the horse, which Tristram led by the bridle, and all night, passing through their beloved woods for the last time, they journeyed in silence. ¶ At dawn they rested, then they went their way again until they came to the hermitage. Ogrin was reading in a book. He saw them, and called to them tenderly from afar: ¶ "Friends! how love drives you from misery to misery. How long will your madness last? Courage. Repent." ¶ Then Tristram said to him: ¶ "Listen, Sir Ogrin. Help us to make peace with the King. I will restore the Queen to him. Then I will go

All night, passing through the beloved woods for the last time, they journeyed in silence.

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far away, to Brittany or Frisia; some day, if the King will suffer me, I will come back and serve him as I ought." ¶ Then Iseult said in her turn, bowing herself at the hermit's feet: ¶ "I will live no longer thus. I say not that I repent of having loved Tristram and of loving him now and always; but our bodies at least shall part." ¶ The hermit wept and praised God: "O God! mighty King! I thank Thee for having suffered me to live long enough to succour these two." He gave them wise counsel, then he took ink and parchment and wrote a letter in which Tristram offered to make a compact with the King. When he had set down all the words that Tristram told him, Tristram set his seal to them. ¶ "Who will carry this letter?" asked the hermit. ¶ "I will bear it myself." ¶ "No, Sir Tristram, you must not go on this perilous adventure. I will go for you, I know all the people of the castle." ¶ "Peace, Sir Ogrin, the Queen shall stay in your hermitage; at nightfall I will go with my squire, who shall keep my horse." ¶ When darkness fell upon the forest, Tristram set out with Gorvenal. At the gates of Tintagel he left the squire. The watchers sounded their trumpets on the walls. He slipped into the moat, and passed through the town at peril of his life. As of old, he scaled the sharp fence of the orchard, and saw again the

marble terrace, the fountain, and the great pine-tree; he approached the window behind which the King was sleeping, and called softly. Mark awoke. ¶ "Who art thou, who callest me at such an hour of the night?" ¶ "Sire, I am called Tristram, and I bring you a letter; I will leave it here, on the grating of this window. Send your answer to the Red Cross, and fasten it to the branches." ¶ "For the love of God, fair nephew, wait for me." ¶ He sprang to the window-sill, and cried thrice into the night: ¶ "Tristram, Tristram, Tristram, my son!" ¶ But Tristram had fled. He joined his squire and was in the saddle at one bound. ¶ "Madman!" said Gorvenal, "hasten, fly by this road." ¶ At last they came to the hermitage, where they found the hermit praying and Iseult weeping.

XI. THE FORD PERILOUS



Oyez, vous tous qui passez par la voie,
Venez ça, chascun de vous voie
S'il est douleur fors que la moie
C'est Tristan que la mort mestroie

LE LAI MORTEL



ARK sent for his chaplain and gave him the letter. The clerk broke the seal and first saluted the King in Tristram's name; then, having skilfully deciphered the written words, he reported Tristram's request. Mark listened in silence, rejoicing in his heart, for he still loved the Queen. ¶ Then he convoked the most considerable among his barons by name, and when they were all assembled, they held their peace and the King spoke: ¶ "My lords, I have received this letter. I am King over you, and ye are my liegemen. Listen to the things which are asked of me; then give me counsel, I pray, since you owe me counsel." ¶ The chaplain rose, untied the parchment with both hands, and standing before the King, began: ¶ "My lords, Tristram first sends love and greeting to the King and all his barons. 'King,' he continues, 'when I killed the dragon and won the King's daughter of Ireland, it was to me they gave her; I was free to keep her, but I would not; I brought her to your country and gave her up to

you. But scarcely had you taken her to wife, when felons caused you to believe their lies. In your rage, fair lord and uncle, you meant to burn us without trial. But God took pity on us; we made intreaty to Him. He saved the Queen, and this justly; and I also escaped by the power of God, when I threw myself from a high rock. What have I done since that can be made a reproach to me? The Queen was given over to lepers. I came to her aid and carried her off; could I have failed in this duty to her who had been like to die, innocent as she was, for my sake? I fled with her into the forest; could I have come out of the woods and descended into the plain to bring her back to you? Had you not commanded that we should be taken dead or alive? But now as then, Sire, I am ready to offer my gage, and to maintain against all comers in battle that never did the Queen bear me, nor I her, a love that was a crime against you. Ordain a combat; I will refuse no adversary, and if I cannot make good my right, burn me before all your men. But if I triumph, and if it please you to take back Iseult of the bright face, no baron will serve you more worthily than I; if, on the other hand, you will none of me, I will cross the sea, and offer myself to the King of Galvoie or the King of Frisia, and you will never hear of me more. Sire, take

counsel, and if you will not agree with me in any sort, I will restore Iseult to Ireland, whence I brought her, and she shall be Queen in her own country.' " ¶ When the barons of Cornwall heard that Tristram offered to do battle against them, they all said to the King: ¶ "Sire, take back the Queen; they were fools who slandered her. As to Tristram, let him go as he says, to fight in Galvoie or for the King of Frisia. Bid him bring Iseult back on an appointed day and speedily." ¶ Then the King asked thrice: ¶ "Doth no man come forth to accuse Tristram?" ¶ All held their peace. Then he said to the chaplain: ¶ "Write a letter with all speed; you have heard what is to be said; hasten and write it; Iseult has suffered but too much in her youthful years! And cause the charter to be hung on the branch of the Red Cross before this evening; use all despatch." ¶ And he added: ¶ "Say further that I send to both greeting and love." ¶ Towards midnight, Tristram crossed the White Plain, found the letter and brought it, sealed, to the hermit Ogrin. The hermit read it to him: Mark, on the counsel of all his barons, consented to take back Iseult, but not to keep Tristram as his champion; Tristram was to cross the seas when, in the space of three days, he should have delivered the Queen into King Mark's hands at the Ford

Perilous. ¶ "Ah God!" said Tristram, "what grief to lose you, beloved! But so it must be, seeing that I can now save you the suffering you bear because of me. When the moment comes for us to part I will give you a present, a gage of my love. From the unknown land whither I go, I will send you a messenger; he will bring me your wishes, beloved, and at your first summons I will hasten to you from that distant country." ¶ Iseult sighed and said: ¶ "Tristram, give me Husdent, thy dog. Never shall a hound of price be held in greater honour. When I see him I shall think of thee, and I shall be less sorrowful. Beloved, I have a ring set with green jasper, take it for love of me and wear it on thy finger; if ever a messenger should come as from thee, I will not credit him whatsoever he may do or say, unless he shows me this ring. But if I have seen it, no force nor royal decree shall hinder me from obeying thy behest, be it wisdom or folly." ¶ "Beloved, I give thee Husdent." ¶ "Beloved, take in return this ring." ¶ Then they kissed each other on the lips. ¶ Now Ogrin, leaving the lovers in the hermitage, had travelled on his crutch to Saint Michael's Mount, and there he bought vair, squirrel fur, and ermine, silken stuffs of purple and scarlet, a shift whiter than lilies, and a palfrey caparisoned with gold, which ambled gently.

Folk laughed to see him spend the coins he had laid up for so many years on these strange and sumptuous purchases; but the old man loaded the horse with the rich stuffs and returned to Iseult. ¶ "Queen, your garments are in rags; accept these gifts, that you may be more beautiful the day you go to the Ford Perilous; I fear they may mislike you; I have little skill in the choice of such adornments." ¶ Meanwhile, the King caused it to be proclaimed throughout Cornwall that in the space of three days he would make peace with the Queen at the Ford Perilous. Knights and ladies came in crowds to the assembly; all desired to see Iseult the Queen again, and all loved her, save the three felons who still lived. ¶ But of these three, one was to perish by the sword, another pierced by an arrow, and the third by drowning; as to the forester, Perinis the Frank, the Fair-haired, was to kill him with his cudgel in the forest. Thus God, who hates all excess, was to avenge the lovers on their enemies. ¶ On the day appointed, the meadow beyond the Ford Perilous gleamed from afar, resplendent with the rich tents of the barons. In the forest, Tristram rode with Iseult, and for fear of an ambush, he had donned his hauberk beneath his rags. Suddenly, they emerged from the forest, and saw King Mark in the distance among his barons. ¶ "Beloved,"

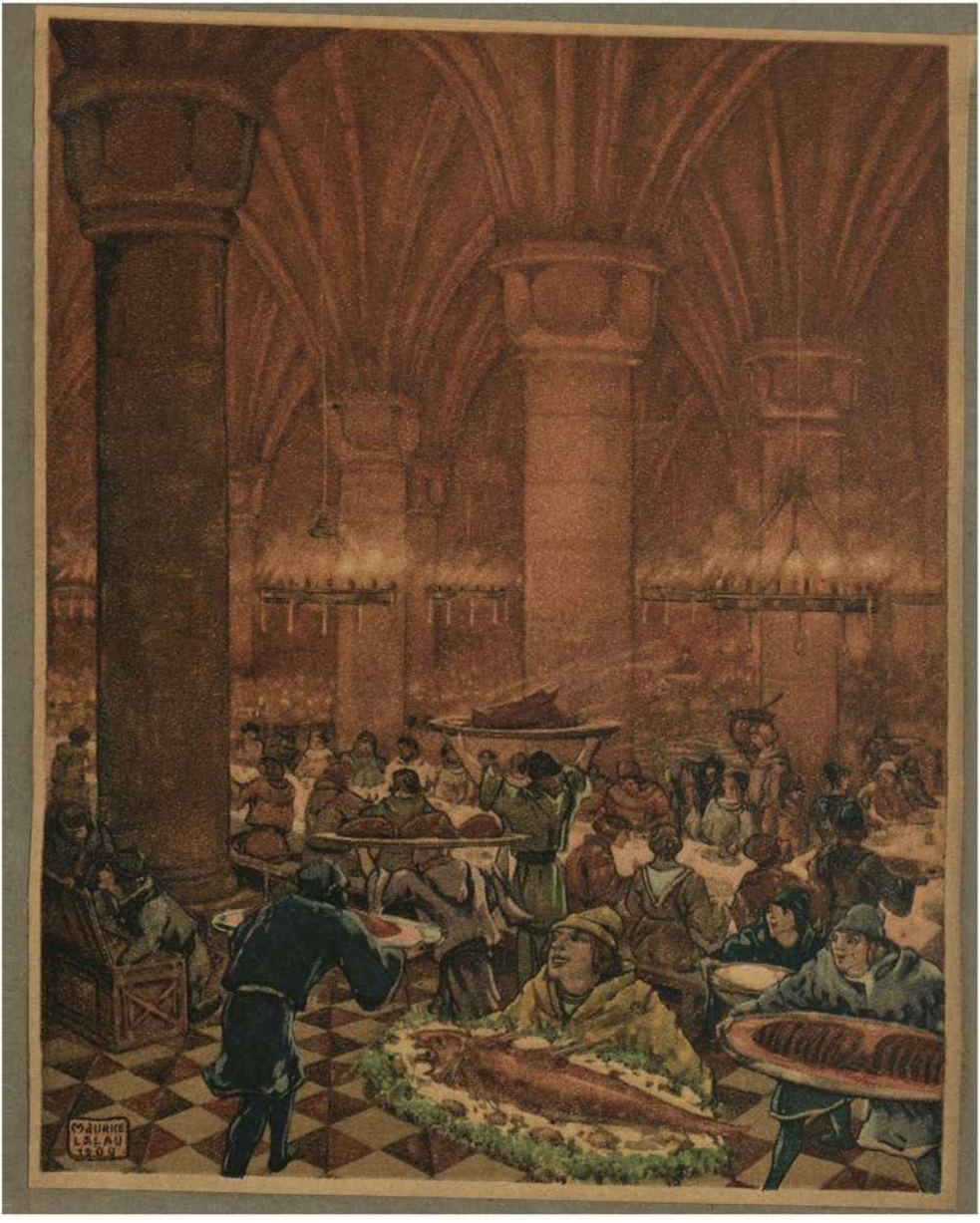
said Tristram, "here is the King thy lord, with his knights and vassals. They are coming towards us; in a moment we shall not be able to speak together any more. By the mighty and glorious God I adjure thee: if ever I send thee a message, do as I bid thee." ¶ "Tristram, my beloved, as soon as I shall have seen the jasper ring neither tower nor wall nor fortress shall hinder me from doing thy behest." ¶ "Iseult, may God reward thee!" ¶ Their horses were pacing side by side; he drew her to him and pressed her in his arms. ¶ "Beloved," said Iseult, "hear my last prayer. Thou art about to quit this country; wait at least a few days; hide thyself until thou hearest how the King uses me, whether in kindness or in anger. I am alone; who will protect me against the felons? I am afraid. Orri the forester will give thee secret shelter; creep in the night to the ruined cell. I will send Perinis to tell thee if none deal harshly with me." ¶ "Beloved, none would dare. I will stay in hiding with Orri; and if any use thee despitefully, let him fear me as he would the evil one." ¶ The two companies had now drawn close enough together to exchange greetings. The King rode forward boldly a bow's shot before his followers, with Dinas of Lidan. ¶ When the barons had rejoined him, Tristram, leading Iseult's palfrey by the bridle, saluted the King and said:

¶ "King, I bring back to thee Iseult the Fair. Before the men of thy kingdom, I demand to be allowed to defend myself in thy court. I have never been judged. Cause me to justify myself in battle. If I am vanquished, burn me in sulphur; if I conquer, keep me with thee; or, if thou wilt not keep me, I will go to a distant land." ¶ None accepted Tristram's challenge. Then Mark, in his turn, took Iseult's palfrey by the bridle, and giving her in charge to Dinas, went aside to take counsel. ¶ Then Dinas, full of joy, did the Queen homage and courtesy. He took off her cloak of rich scarlet and showed her graceful body in the close tunic and the silken overdress. And the Queen smiled, remembering the old hermit who had lavished his hoard. Her robe was sumptuous, her eyes grey, her hair lustrous as sunbeams. ¶ When the felons saw her beautiful and honoured as of yore, they were full of wrath and they rode up to the King. Just at this moment one of his barons, André de Nicole, was striving to persuade him: ¶ "Sire," said he, "keep Tristram with thee; and because of him, thou wilt be a more redoubtable king." ¶ Thus by degrees, he softened the King's heart. But the felons came up and said: ¶ "King, hearken to the counsel we give thee in all loyalty. The Queen was wrongfully slandered, we confess; but if she and Tristram return together to the

court, there will be more evil talk. Let Tristram go away for a season; one day no doubt thou wilt recall him." ¶ Mark did so; he commanded Tristram by his barons to go without delay. Then Tristram approached the Queen, and bade her farewell. The Queen was ashamed because of the assembly, and she blushed. ¶ But the King was moved to pity, and speaking to his nephew for the first time, he said: ¶ "Where wilt thou go in these rags? Take from my treasury all things needful for thee, gold and silver, and vair." ¶ "King," answered Tristram, "I will take neither groat nor garment. As well as I may, I will go joyfully to serve the rich King of Frisia." ¶ Then he turned his horse and rode towards the sea. Iseult gazed after him, and set her face towards him till she could see him no more. ¶ At the news of the reconcilement, great and small, women and children, hastened in crowds out of the town to meet Iseult, and bewailing Tristram's exile, they rejoiced over their recovered Queen. The King, counts and princes led her in procession along streets strewn with flowers and decked with silken hangings, amidst the pealing of bells. The palace gates were thrown open to all comers; rich and poor might sit down and eat, and to celebrate the day Mark set free a hundred of his serfs and gave sword and hauberk to twenty youths whom he armed with his own

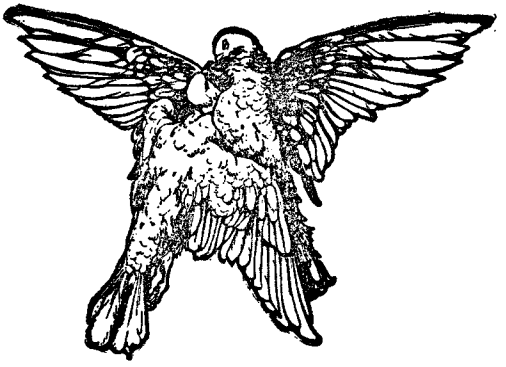
The palace gates were thrown open to all comers; rich and poor might sit down and eat.

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hands. ¶ Meanwhile when night fell, Tristram, as he had promised the Queen, crept to the forester Orri, who gave him secret shelter in the ruined cell. Ah! felons, look to yourselves!

XII. THE ORDEAL BY RED-HOT IRON



Dieu i a fait vertuz

BÉROUL



EFORE long Denoalen, Andret, and Gondoine thought themselves safe: doubtless Tristram was dragging out his life beyond the seas, in a land too distant to reach them. Hence one day in the chase, when the King, listening to the barking of his pack, had reined in his horse in the midst of a clearing, the three rode up to him: ¶ "King, hearken to us. Thou didst condemn the Queen without trial, and this was evil; but now thou hast absolved her without trial, and is not this also evil? Never has she justified herself, and the barons of thy kingdom blame you both therefor. Counsel her that she should herself demand the judgment of God. If she be innocent, why should she fear to swear on the bones of the saints that she has never sinned? or to lay hold of a red-hot iron? Thus hath custom ordained, and this simple ordeal will suffice to drive out all former suspicions." ¶ But Mark answered wrathfully: ¶ "May God destroy you, lords of Cornwall, who seek continually to shame me! I have driven away my nephew for you. What

would you more? That I should drive the Queen away to Ireland? What new cause of complaint have you? As for your former griefs, did not Tristram offer himself to defend her? He presented himself as her champion before you all; why then did you not take lance and buckler against him? My lords, you have exceeded your rights. Tremble, lest I recall the man I sent away at your desire." ¶ Then the cowards feared greatly; they seemed to see Tristram returning, and draining the blood from their bodies. ¶ "Sire, we give you loyal counsel for your honour, as beseems your vassals; but henceforth we will be silent. Forget your wrath, and leave us in peace." ¶ But Mark rose in his stirrups: ¶ "Begone from my kingdom, felons! There is no further peace between me and you. For you I drove out Tristram; begone, in your turn!" ¶ "Be it so, Sire! Our castles are strong, well fenced with piles, on rocky heights hard to scale." ¶ And they turned their horses' heads without saluting him. ¶ Waiting neither for hounds nor huntsmen, Mark spurred his horse to Tintagel, and mounted the stair into the great hall. The Queen heard his hasty steps resounding on the stone flags. ¶ She rose and came to meet him as was her wont, took his sword from him, and bowed to his feet. Mark held her by the hands and raised her, and Iseult, looking up

at him, saw his noble features distorted by anger; thus had he appeared to her of yore in his rage before the burning pyre. ¶ "Ah!" thought she, "my beloved is discovered, the King has taken him." ¶ Her heart grew cold within her breast, and, without a word, she fell at the King's feet. He took her in his arms and kissed her tenderly; and by degrees she revived. ¶ "Beloved, beloved, what ails thee?" ¶ "Sire, I am afraid; I saw thou wert angry." ¶ "Yes, I have come back from the hunt in great wrath." ¶ "Ah! Sire, if your huntsmen have vexed you, is it well to take such contrarieties of the chase so much to heart?" ¶ Mark smiled at these words: ¶ "No, beloved, my huntsmen have not vexed me, but three felons who have long hated us; thou knowest them, Andret, Denoalen, and Gondoïne; I have banished them from my kingdom." ¶ "Sire, what evil did they dare to say of me?" ¶ "What matters it? I have banished them." ¶ "Sire, all men have a right to say what they think. But I too have a right to know of what I am accused. And from whom should I learn it, if not from you? Alone in this strange land, I have no one but you, Sire, to defend me." ¶ "Be it so then. They declare that it beseems thee to justify thyself by oath and by the ordeal of red-hot iron. Should not the Queen herself, they say, demand this trial?

The ordeal is slight to one who is conscious of innocence. What would it cost her? God is the true judge; He would abolish the old doubts for ever. But enough of these things. I have banished them, as I told you." ¶ Iseult trembled; she looked at the King. ¶ "Sire, order them to return to thy court. I will justify myself by oath." ¶ "When?" ¶ "On the tenth day from this." ¶ "The time is very short, beloved." ¶ "It is all too long. But I require that meantime you request King Arthur to ride with his lords Gawain, Girflet, Sir Kay the seneschal, and one hundred of his knights to the marches of your kingdom, to the White Plain, on the banks of the river that divides your territories. I will make my vow there before them, and not before your barons only; for when I shall have sworn, your barons will require you to impose some new ordeal, and our torments will have no end. But they will not dare, if Arthur and his knights attest the judgment." ¶ While the heralds, King Mark's messengers, were hastening to Carduel to King Arthur, Iseult secretly despatched her servant Perinis the Fair-haired, the Faithful, to Tristram. ¶ Perinis ran through the woods, avoiding the beaten paths, till he reached the hut of Orri the forester, where Tristram had awaited him for many days past. Perinis told him of the things that had happened, of the new malice,

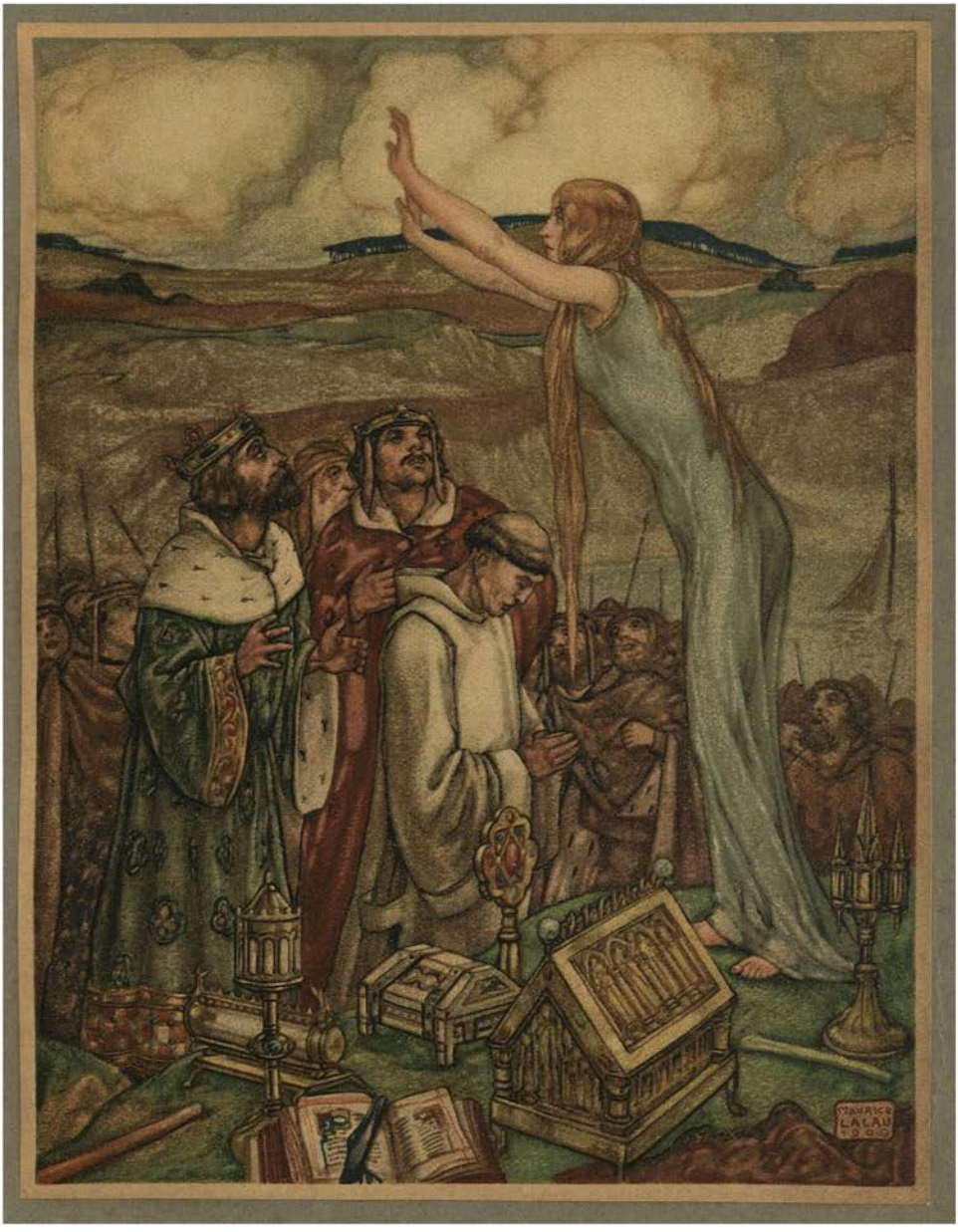
the date of the ordeal, the appointed hour and place. ¶ "Sir, my lady requires of you to be on the White Plain on the appointed day, in a pilgrim's gown, so skilfully disguised that none may recognise you, and unarmed. To reach the place of judgment, she will have to cross the river in a boat; you are to await her on the opposite shore, where King Arthur's knights will be gathered. Doubtless you will then be able to help her. My lady dreads the day of the ordeal; nevertheless, she trusts to the courtesy of God, who saved her from the hands of the lepers." ¶ "Return to the Queen, fair and gentle friend Perinis; tell her I will obey her." ¶ Now, gentles, as Perinis returned towards Tintagel, he perceived in a thicket the same forester who had formerly surprised the sleeping lovers and denounced them to the King. One day when he was drunk he had boasted of his treachery. This man had dug a deep pit in the earth, which he had covered skilfully with branches, to snare wolves and boars. He saw the Queen's servant bounding towards him, and tried to fly. But Perinis pressed him back to the edge of the pit: ¶ "Spy who betrayed the Queen, why wouldst thou fly? Stay here by the grave thou hast digged for thyself!" His cudgel hummed in the air as he whirled it round. Cudgel and skull cracked at the same moment, and Perinis the Fair-haired, the Faithful,

spurned the corpse with his foot into the pit. ¶ On the day appointed for the ordeal, Mark, Iseult, and the barons of Cornwall rode to the White Plain, and came in splendid array to the brink of the river; Arthur's knights, grouped on the opposite bank, saluted them with their brilliant banners. ¶ Before them on the bank sat a poor pilgrim, wrapped in his mantle, which was hung with scallop shells; he held out his wooden bowl and craved alms in sharp complaining tones. ¶ The Cornish boats came over, rowed by oarsmen. When they drew near the bank, Iseult said to the knights about her: ¶ "My lords, how shall I reach the land without soiling my long robes in the mud. A ferryman must come and help me." ¶ One of the knights hailed the pilgrim: ¶ "Friend, gird up thy mantle, come down into the water and carry the Queen, if indeed, broken as thou art, thou dost not fear to fall by the way." ¶ "The man took the Queen in his arms. She whispered in his ear: "Beloved!" and then, more softly still: "Fall upon the sand." ¶ When he reached the bank, he stumbled and fell, holding the Queen closely in his arms. Then the squires and mariners, seizing oars and boat-hooks, pursued the poor wretch. ¶ "Leave him in peace," said the Queen; "no doubt his long pilgrimage has weakened him." ¶ And unfastening a golden

clasp, she threw it to the pilgrim. ¶ In front of King Arthur's tent, a rich cloth of Nicæan silk was spread on the green grass, and the relics of the saints, taken from numerous caskets and shrines, were already laid out upon it. Gawain, Girflet, and Kay the seneschal, kept guard over them. ¶ Then the Queen, having prayed to God, took off the jewels from her neck and hands and gave them to poor beggars; she unfastened her purple mantle, and her fine guimpe, and gave them too, and likewise her robe and her girdle, and her jewelled shoes. She kept only a sleeveless tunic on her body, and with bare arms and feet, she advanced before the two Kings. The barons around gazed at her in silence, and wept. Near the relics a brazier was burning. Trembling, she stretched out her right hand to the relics and said: ¶ "King of Logres and King of Cornwall, Sir Gawain, Sir Kay, Sir Girflet, and all you who are to be my sureties, by these holy bodies and by all the holy bodies in the world, I swear that no man born of woman hath held me in his arms save King Mark, my lord, and the poor pilgrim whom you saw fall down on the shore. King Mark, is this oath sufficient? ¶ "Yes, Queen, and may God make his judgment manifest." ¶ "Amen," answered Iseult. ¶ She approached the brazier, pale and trembling. All were silent; the iron was red. Then she

plunged her bare arms into the red coals, seized the bar of iron, walked nine paces carrying it, then, dropping it, stretched out her arms on either side, the palms open. And every one saw that the flesh was as whole as the plums on a plum-tree. ¶ Then a great cry of praise to God rose from every throat.

She stretched out her arms on either side, the palms open.
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XIII. THE NIGHTINGALE'S SONG



Tristan defors e chante e gient
Cum russinol que prent congé
De fin d'esté od grand pité

LE DOMNEI DES AMANZ



N his return to the forester's hut, Tristram had thrown down his staff and doffed his pilgrim's weeds. He knew in his heart that the day had come to keep faith with King Mark, and to leave the land of Cornwall. ¶ Why did he still linger? The Queen was justified, the King cherished and honoured her. Arthur would protect her at need, and henceforth no felony would prevail against her. Why then should he continue to hover round Tintagel? He was risking his life vainly, and the life of the forester, and Iseult's peace. Certes, it was time to go, and he had held the fair body of Iseult in his arms for the last time under his pilgrim's gown on the White Plain. ¶ Three days later, he was still lingering, unable to quit the land where the Queen was living. But when the fourth day came, he took leave of the forester who had given him shelter, and said to Gorvenal: ¶ "Dear master, now is the hour of a long farewell; we will go into the land of Wales." ¶ They set out sadly, in the night. But their road skirted the fenced orchard where Tristram

had waited of yore for his beloved. The night was clear and brilliant. At a turn of the road he saw the sturdy trunk of the great pine-tree rising against the clear sky not far from the fence. ¶ "Dear master, wait for me in the wood hard by; I will be back presently." ¶ "Where goest thou? Madman, wilt thou never cease to court death?" ¶ But Tristram had already cleared the fence at a bound. He came to the great pine-tree, near the marble balustrade. What would it avail him now to throw well-fashioned chips into the fountain? Iseult would come no more! With soft and supple footsteps he ventured to approach the castle by the path the Queen had traversed in former days. ¶ In her chamber Iseult lay awake in the arms of the sleeping King. Suddenly, through the open casement where the moonbeams played came the voice of a nightingale. ¶ Iseult listened to the melodious sounds that came to add enchantment to the night; she rose sadly, so sadly that she would have touched the cruellest, the most murderous heart. The Queen thought: "Whence comes this melody?" Suddenly she understood: "Ah! it is Tristram. Thus was he wont to charm me in the forest of Morois by imitating song-birds. He is going and this is his last farewell. How he laments! Like to the nightingale when he takes his leave at the close of summer, in great sadness.

Under the trees he pressed her to his heart without a word.

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MAURICE
LALAU
1903

Beloved, never shall I listen to thy voice again." ¶ The melody thrilled yet more ardently through the night. ¶ "Ah! what wouldst thou? That I should come to thee? No, remember Ogrin the hermit, and the vows we made. Cease, death lies in wait for us. What do I reck of death! Thou callest me, I come, I come!" ¶ She disengaged herself from the King's arms and threw a mantle lined with squirrel upon her almost naked body. She had to cross the neighbouring hall, where ten knights kept watch by turns; the while five of them slept, five others stood armed by doors and casements. But it chanced that they were all asleep, five upon beds and five upon the floor. Iseult stepped over the scattered bodies, and lifted the bar of the door; the ring clanked, but none of the sleepers wakened. She crossed the threshold and the song ceased. ¶ Under the trees he pressed her to his heart without a word; their arms wound closely about each other's bodies, they clasped each other as if they had been bound together by cords until daybreak. In spite of King and guards, the lovers taste of joy and love. ¶ This night had bewitched the lovers; and in the days that followed, as the King had left Tintagel to hold his court of judgment at Saint Lubin, Tristram, who had returned to Orri's hut, ventured every morning, in broad daylight, to creep through the orchard to the

women's chambers. ¶ A serf surprised him, and went in search of Andret, Denoalen, and Gondoïne. ¶ "My lords, the beast you thought you had dislodged has come back to his lair." ¶ "Who?" ¶ "Tristram." ¶ "When didst thou see him?" ¶ "This morning, I marked him well. And to-morrow morning you too may see him come at dawn, his sword girt round him, a bow in one hand, two arrows in the other. ¶ "Where shall we see him?" ¶ "By a certain window which I know. But if I show it to you what will you give me?" ¶ "A gold mark and you will be a rich churl." ¶ "Then listen," said the serf. "One can see into the Queen's chamber by a narrow window which commands it, for it is pierced very high in the wall. But a great curtain hung across the room masks the opening. To-morrow morning let one of you come boldly into the orchard, cut a long thorn shoot and sharpen the end; let him then climb up to the window, and thrust the shoot like a spit into the stuff of the curtain; he will then be able to draw it a little aside, and you shall give my body to be burnt, my lords, if you do not see what I have told you behind the curtain." ¶ Andret, Gondoïne, and Denoalen debated which among them should first enjoy this spectacle, and finally they agreed to yield it to Gondoïne. They parted, to meet again the next morning at dawn.

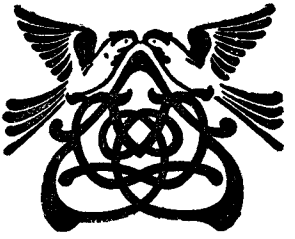
To-morrow at dawn, fair gentlemen, beware of Tristram! ¶ The next day, when the night was still dark, Tristram, leaving the hut of Orri the forester, crept towards the castle under the dense thicket of thorn. As he came out of a coppice, he looked through a clearing, and saw Gondoïne coming from his manor. Tristram drew back into the thorns and crouched in ambush. ¶ "Ah! God grant that he who comes may not see me before the right moment!" ¶ He waited, sword in hand; but it chanced that Gondoïne took another road, and went away. Tristram came out of the thicket, bent his bow and took aim. Alas! the man was already out of range. ¶ At this moment Denoalen, followed by two large hounds, came ambling gently along the path on a little black palfrey. Tristram watched him, hidden behind an apple-tree. He saw him urging on his dogs to dislodge a wild boar in a copse. But before the hounds could turn him out of his den, their master had received a wound that no leech could stanch. When Denoalen was close to him, Tristram threw off his cloak, sprang forth, and stood before his enemy. The traitor sought to flee, but in vain; he had not even time to cry: "I am wounded!" He fell from his horse, Tristram cut off his head, severed the locks that hung round the face, and thrust them into his hose; he wished to show them to Iseult to

rejoice the heart of his beloved. Alas, he thought, what has become of Gondoïne? He has escaped! Would I had been able to pay him in the same coin! ¶ He wiped his sword, put it back into the sheath, dragged the trunk of a tree over the body, and went his way to his beloved, his head shrouded in his hood. ¶ Gondoïne had arrived before him at the castle of Tintagel; he had already climbed up to the high window, thrust his thorn stick into the curtain and drawn aside two widths of the stuff; he looked into the freshly strown chamber. At first he could see no one but Perinis; then he perceived Bragwaine, still holding in her hand the comb with which she had just combed Iseult's golden hair. ¶ But presently Iseult entered and then Tristram. In one hand he still carried his bow and two arrows, in the other two long locks of hair. ¶ He dropped his cloak and his fair body appeared. Iseult the Fair bowed herself to greet him, and as she rose, lifting her head towards him, she saw the shadow of Gondoïne's head on the hanging. Tristram said to her: ¶ "Seest thou these fine tresses? They are Denoalen's. I have avenged thee on him. Never again will he buy or sell shield or lance." ¶ "It is well, my lord; but bend this bow, I pray you; I wish to see if it is easy to draw." ¶ So Tristram bent the bow, surprised and scarcely understanding. Then Iseult

took one of the two arrows, strung it, looked to make sure that the cord was stout, and said low and swift: ¶ "I see something that displeases me. Aim well, Tristram." ¶ He stood ready, raised his head, and high up on the curtain he saw the shadow of Gondoïne. "May God," said he, "guide my shaft!" Then he turned to the wall and shot. The long arrow whistled through the air swifter than merlin or swallow, pierced the traitor's eye, passed through his brain as through the flesh of an apple, and stopped quivering against the skull. Without a cry, Gondoïne dropped and fell on a stake. ¶ Then said Iseult to Tristram: ¶ "Fly now, beloved. Thou seest, the felons know thy refuge. Andret still lives, he will report it to the King; thou art no longer safe in the forester's hut. Fly, beloved, Perinis the Faithful shall hide this body in the forest so well that the King shall never hear any tidings of it. But flee from this country for thy safety and for mine!" ¶ Tristram said: "How can I live without thee?" ¶ "Yes, beloved, our lives are bound and woven together. I, too, how can I live without thee? My body remains here, my heart goes with thee." ¶ "Iseult, beloved, I go, I know not to what country. But if ever thou seest again the green jasper ring, wilt thou do my behest?" ¶ "Yes, thou knowest I will; when I see again the green

jasper ring, no tower, no fortress, no royal command will prevent me from doing my beloved's will, be it wisdom or folly." ¶ "Beloved, may the God born at Bethlehem bless thee for these words." ¶ "Beloved, God keep thee."

XIV. THE MAGIC BELL.



Ne membre vus, ma belle ami
D'une petite druerie?

LA FOLIE TRISTAN



RISTRAM took refuge in Wales, on the domain of the noble Duke Gilain. The Duke was young, puissant, and debonair; he received him as a welcome guest; sparing no pains to do him honour and give him joy; but neither adventures nor festivals could appease Tristram's anguish. ¶ One day, when he was sitting by the young Duke, his heart was so full of grief that he sighed unconsciously. Then the Duke, to ease his pain, ordered his favourite pastime to be brought to his private chamber, one which charmed his eyes and his heart by magic power in hours of sadness. On a table, covered with a rich cloth of purple, his servants placed his dog Petit-Crû. It was an enchanted dog; it came from the Isle of Avalon; a fairy had sent it to him as a love-token. No words could suffice to describe its nature and its beauty. Its hair was tinted with shades so marvellously disposed that it was not possible to say of what colour it was; at first its neck seemed whiter than snow, its croup greener than clover, one of its

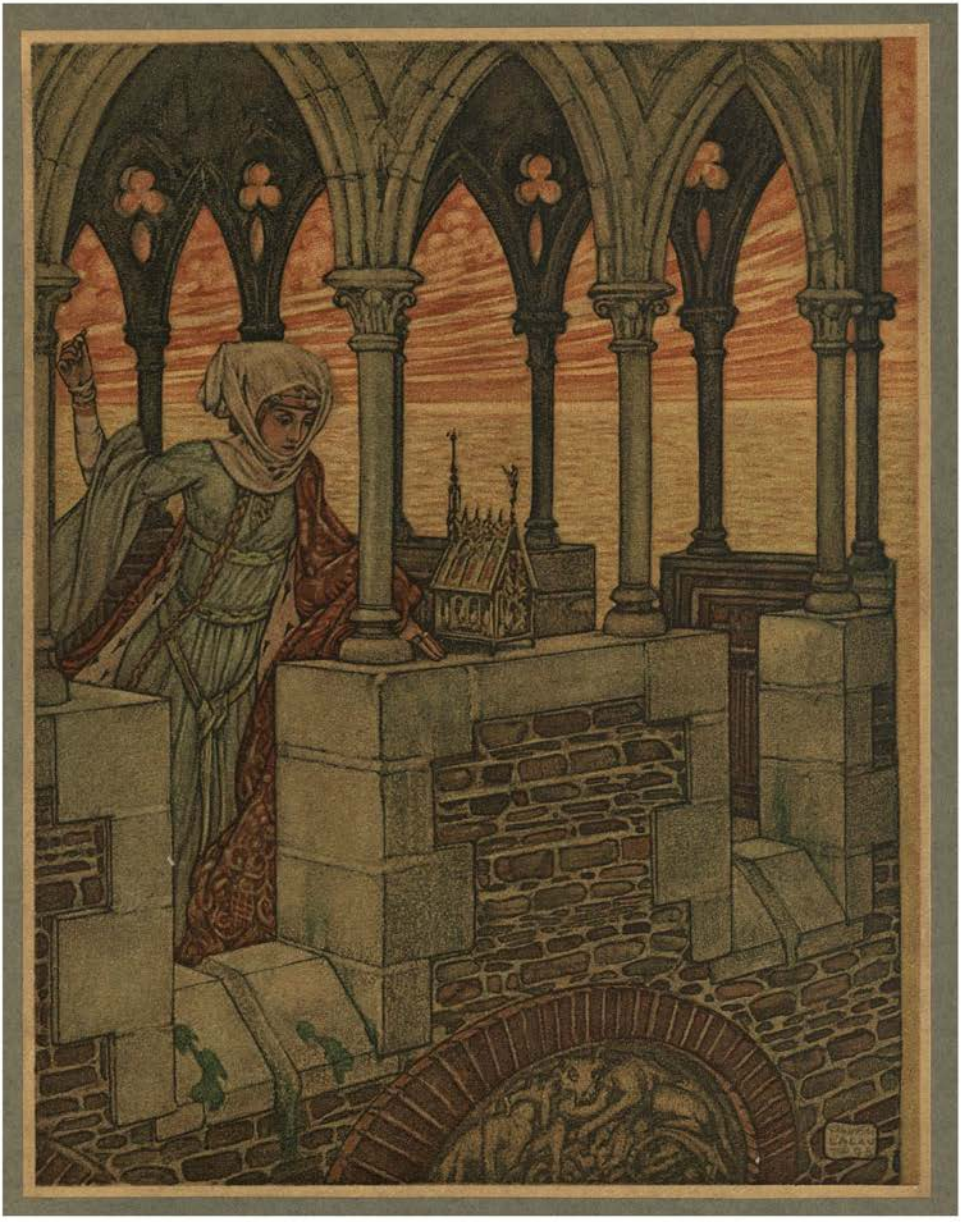
sides red as scarlet, the other yellow as saffron, its belly blue as lapis lazuli, its back rose-coloured. But when one looked longer all these colours danced before the eyes and shifted, showing in turn white, green, yellow, blue, purple, dark and light. From a slender gold chain about his neck hung a tiny gold bell, which tinkled with so gay, clear, and sweet a sound that, as he heard it, Tristram's heart was soothed, and his pain melted away. He remembered no more all the miseries he had suffered for the Queen's sake; for this was the magic virtue of the little bell: the heart forgot all its griefs when it rang so gaily, clearly and sweetly. Now while Tristram, moved by the spell, caressed the little enchanted animal which took away his grief, and whose coat felt softer than samite to the touch, he bethought him that it would be a fair present for Iseult. But what could he do? Duke Gilain prized Petit-Crû above all things, and none could have obtained the animal from him either by entreaties or cunning. ¶ One day Tristram said to the Duke: ¶ "Sir, what would you give to one who should deliver your land from the giant Urgan the Hairy, who extorts heavy tributes from you?" ¶ "Truly, I would let the victor choose among my treasures what he should hold most precious; but no one would venture to attack the giant." ¶ "These are mar-

vellous words," said Tristram. "But good never comes to a country save by adventures, and I would not renounce my hope of fighting the giant for all the gold of Milan." ¶ "Then," said Duke Gilain, "may the God born of a Virgin be with you and save you from death." ¶ Tristram found Urgan the Hairy in his den. They fought long and furiously. Finally, valour triumphed over strength, the nimble sword over the heavy club, and Tristram, having cut off the giant's right hand, brought it to the Duke, saying: ¶ "Sir, give me your enchanted dog, Petit-Crû, as a reward according to your promise." ¶ "Friend, what dost thou ask? Leave him to me, and take rather my sister and the half of my domain." ¶ "Sir, your sister is fair, and fair are your lands; but it was to win your fairy dog that I fought Urgan the Hairy. Remember your promise!" ¶ "Take him, then; but know that thou hast robbed me of the joy of my eyes and the gaiety of my heart." ¶ Tristram entrusted the dog to a Welsh minstrel, a prudent and cunning man, who took it to Cornwall from him. He came to Tintagel, and gave it secretly to Bragwaine. The Queen delighted greatly in it; she gave the minstrel ten gold marks in recompense, and told the King that her mother, the Queen of Ireland, had sent her this precious present. She caused a

goldsmith to make a kennel incrusted with gold and precious stones for the dog, and everywhere she went she carried it with her in memory of her lover. And every time she looked at it, sorrow, anguish, and regret faded from her heart. ¶ At first she did not understand the marvel; when she found it so sweet to gaze at the little animal, she thought it was because it came from Tristram; it was, no doubt, the thought of her lover that soothed her pain thus. But one day she understood that it was an enchantment, and that it was the tinkling of the little bell that charmed her heart. ¶ "Ah!" she thought, "is it well that I should take comfort while Tristram is wretched? He might have kept this enchanted dog and so have forgotten all his grief. Of his courtesy he chose rather to send it to me, to give me his joy and take back his misery. But it is not well that it should be so. Tristram, beloved, I will suffer as long as thou sufferest." ¶ She took the magic bell, rang it for the last time, untied it gently, then threw it into the sea from the open window.

She took the magic bell, rang it for the last time, then threw it into the sea.

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XV. ISEULT OF THE WHITE HAND



Ire de femme est a duter
Moi s'en deit bien chascuns garder
Cum de leger vient leur amur
De leger revient lur haür

THOMAS THE RHYMER



IFE and death were alike hateful to the lovers apart. Separation was neither life nor death, but life and death at once. ¶ Tristram essayed to flee from his misery, journeying over seas, islands, and countries. He returned to his land of Lyonnesse, where Rohalt the Faith-keeper received his son with tears of tenderness; but Tristram could not endure life in his peaceful realm, and he wandered through duchies and kingdoms in search of adventures. From Lyonnesse to Frisia, from Frisia to Galvoie, from Germany to Spain, he served many lords and carried out many enterprises. But for two years no news came to him from Cornwall, no friend, no message. ¶ Then he thought that Iseult loved him no longer, and that she had forgotten him. ¶ Now it happened one day as he was riding with Sir Gorvenal, that he entered the land of Brittany. They crossed a desolate plain; on every side were ruined walls, villages without inhabitants, fields ravaged by fire; their horses trod on coals and cinders. On this deserted plain Tristram thought: ¶ "I

am weary and exhausted. What do all these adventures avail me? My lady is far from me, never shall I see her more. For two whole years she has not sent in search of me. I have had no word from her. At Tintagel the King serves and honours her; she lives joyfully. Certes, the dog's enchanted bell has done its work! She has forgotten me, and little does she reck of the joys and griefs of yore, little does she reck of the wretch who wanders in this desolate land. Should I not in my turn forget her who has forgotten me? Shall I never find one to heal my woe?" ¶ For two days Tristram and Gorvenal passed through fields and villages without seeing a man, a cock, or a dog. On the third day at none, they approached a hill on which was an old chapel, and hard by, a hermit's cell. The hermit was clad, not in a woven garment, but in a goatskin, with woollen rags upon his back. Prostrate upon the ground, his knees and elbows bare, he implored Mary Magdalen to inspire him with salutary prayers. He bade the travellers welcome, and while Gorvenal stalled the horses, he disarmed Tristram and then brought forth food. He offered them no delicate meats, but barley bread kneaded with cinders and spring water. After the meal, as night was falling and they sat round the fire, Tristram asked what this ruined country was. ¶ "Fair sir," replied the hermit, "it is the land

of Brittany, held by Duke Hoël. It was once a fair land, rich in meadows and ploughed fields, mills, apple-trees, and farms. But Count Riol of Nantes has laid it waste; his foragers have set fire to it on every side and carried off spoil. His men have been enriched for many a long day; such is the fortune of war." ¶ "Brother," said Tristram, "why did Count Riol thus shame your lord, Hoël?" ¶ "I will tell you, sir, the cause of the war. You must know that Riol is Duke Hoël's vassal. Now the Duke has a daughter, fairest among kings' daughters, and Count Riol wished to take her to wife. But her father refused to give her to a vassal, and Count Riol tried to carry her off by force. Many have perished in this quarrel." ¶ Then Tristram asked: ¶ "Can Duke Hoël still carry on the war?" ¶ "Scarcely, my lord. Nevertheless, his last fortress, Carhaix, still holds out, for the walls are stout, and stout too is the heart of Duke Hoël's son, Kaherdin, the good knight. But the enemy presses them close, and starves them; they can hardly hold out much longer." ¶ Tristram asked how far it was to the castle of Carhaix. ¶ "Sir, but two miles." ¶ Then they separated and slept. In the morning, after the hermit had sung matins and shared his barley bread with them, Tristram took leave of the holy man and rode towards Carhaix. ¶ When

they stopped at the foot of the walls, they saw a band of men standing on the covered way and they asked for the Duke. Hoël was among these men with his son Kaherdin. He made himself known, and Tristram said: ¶ "I am Tristram, King of Lyonnesse, and Mark, King of Cornwall, is my uncle. I have learnt, my lord, that your vassals are doing you wrong, and I have come to offer you my service." ¶ "Alas! Sir Tristram, go your way and may God reward you. How can we receive you here? We have no more victuals, no corn, nothing but beans and barley to live on." ¶ "What matter?" said Tristram. "I have lived in a forest for two years, on herbs and roots and venison, and know that this life pleased me well. Order your men to open the gate for me." ¶ Then said Kaherdin: ¶ "Receive him, my father, since he hath such courage, and let him share our good and evil." ¶ They received him with great honour. Kaherdin showed his guest the stout walls and the main tower, well flanked with grated loopholes where the cross-bowmen stood in ambush. From the battlements he showed him in the plain at a distance the tents and banners set up by Count Riol. When they returned to the threshold of the castle, Kaherdin said to Tristram: ¶ "Now, fair friend, we will go up to the chamber where are my mother and my sister."

¶ Hand in hand they entered the women's chamber. The mother and daughter, seated on a counterpane, sewed gold ornaments on a pall of English work and sang a needle-song: they sang how the Fair Doette, seated in the wind under a hawthorn-tree, waited and lamented for her beloved, Doon, so long in coming. Tristram saluted them and they saluted him, then the two knights sat beside them, and Kaherdin, showing the stole his mother embroidered, said: ¶ "See, fair friend, what a needlewoman is my lady; how rarely she decorates stoles and chasubles to give to poor churches! and how my sister's hands run the gold threads over this white samite. By my troth, fair sister, thou art rightly named Iseult of the White Hand." ¶ Then Tristram, hearing she was called Iseult, smiled and looked more tenderly at her. ¶ Now Count Riol had set up his camp three miles from Carhaix, and for many days Duke Hoël's men had not dared to sally forth against them. But, on the morrow, Tristram, Kaherdin and twelve young knights went out from Carhaix, their hauberks on their backs, their helmets laced, and rode under the pine-woods to the confines of their enemy's camp; then, breaking out of the covert, they carried off a waggon of Count Riol's. From this day forth, relying in turn on valour and cunning, they overturned his ill-guarded tents, attacked his convoys,

harassed and killed his men, and never did they return to Carhaix without some spoil. Hereupon, Tristram and Kaherdin began to bear faith and affection one to another, so that they swore friendship and brotherhood together. Never did they break their bond, as this story will show you. ¶ Now when they rode back from sallies, conversing of chivalry and courtesy, often would Kaherdin praise to his dear comrade his sister Iseult of the White Hand, Iseult the fair, the simple. ¶ One morning, at daybreak, a watchman came down in haste from his tower, and ran through the halls, crying: ¶ "My lords, you have slept too long. Rise, Riol advances to the assault." ¶ Knights and citizens armed and ran to the walls; in the plain they saw helmets gleaming, pennons of cendal fluttering, and all Riol's host advancing in fair array. Duke Hoël and Kaherdin at once deployed their first company of knights before the gates. When they came within bowshot length of each other, they spurred their horses, lances in rest, and the arrows fell upon them like April rain. ¶ But Tristram armed in his turn, with those whom the watchman had wakened last. He laced his hose, put on his surcoat, his close-fitting leg-pieces, and his golden spurs; he donned his hauberk, adjusted his helmet; he mounted, spurred his horse into the plain, and

appeared, his buckler raised before his breast, shouting "Carhaix." It was time; Hoël's men were already falling back towards the outworks. Then was it fair to see the mêlée of fallen horses and wounded vassals, the blows dealt by the young knights, and the grass growing red beneath their feet. In the forefront of the battle, Kaherdin had halted proudly, seeing a hardy baron rise up against him, the brother of Count Riol. Both were struck by the lowered lances. The Nantais broke his without unhorsing Kaherdin, whose surer thrust shattered his adversary's shield, and carried the steel into his side up to the shaft. Lifted from his saddle, the knight was unseated and fell. ¶ At the cry uttered by his brother, Riol rushed with loose rein upon Kaherdin. But Tristram barred the way. As they met, Tristram's lance was shivered in his hands, and Riol's, directed against his adversary's horse, pierced its breast and laid it dead upon the field. Tristram sprang to his feet, sword in hand: ¶ "Coward," cried he, "death to him who avoids the rider and kills the horse. Thou shalt not leave this field alive!" ¶ "Thou liest," answered Riol, spurring his charger against him. ¶ But Tristram parried the attack, and lifting his arm, brought his sword down heavily on Riol's helmet, piercing the circlet and carrying away the nasal. The blade

slipped from the knight's shoulder to the flank of the horse, who staggered and fell in his turn. Riol disengaged himself and rose to his feet; then the two on foot, with shattered shields, and hauberks unbuckled, defied and assailed each other; finally, Tristram struck Riol upon the carbuncle of his helmet. The circlet gave way, and the blow was so shrewd that the count fell upon his hands and knees. ¶ "Rise if thou canst, vassal," cried Tristram; it was an evil chance that brought thee to this plain; thou must die!" ¶ Riol rose to his feet, but Tristram struck him down again with a blow which cleft the helmet, cut through the coif, and left the skull bare. Riol begged for mercy, asked for his life, and handed his sword to Tristram. He took it just in time, for the Nantais came up on every side to their lord's rescue. But he was already recreant. ¶ Riol promised to go to Duke Hoël's prison, to swear homage and fealty to him once more, and to restore the towns and villages he had ravaged. At his command the battle ceased, and his host drew off. ¶ When the victors had returned to Carhaix, Kaherdin said to his father: ¶ "Sir, call Tristram, and keep him with you; there is no better knight on earth, and your land needs a baron of his prowess." ¶ Having taken counsel with his men, Duke Hoël sent for Tristram: ¶ "Friend, I cannot show you too

Then the two, on foot, with shattered shields and hauberks unbuckled, defied and assailed each other.

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much love, for you have saved this land. I would therefore pay my debt to you. My daughter, Iseult of the White Hand, is born of dukes, kings and queens. Take her, I give her to you." ¶ "Sir, I will take her," said Tristram. ¶ Ah! gentles, why did he say that word? For that word he died. ¶ The day and time are appointed. The Duke comes with his friends, Tristram with his. The chaplain chants the Mass. Before all men, at the gate of the monastery church, Tristram weds Iseult of the White Hand according to the laws of Holy Church. The bridal was rich and sumptuous. ¶ But when night came, and Tristram's men disrobed him, it happened that in drawing off the tight sleeve of his tunic, they pulled from his finger his jasper ring, the ring of Iseult the Fair. It fell with a sharp sound upon the flagstones. Tristram looked and saw it. Then his old love awoke, and Tristram acknowledged his guilt. ¶ He remembered the day when Iseult the Fair had given him this ring; it was in the forest where she had lived a life of hardship for his sake. And lying by the other Iseult's side, he saw again the hut of the Morois. What madness had made him in his heart accuse his love of treachery? No, she had suffered every evil for him, and it was he alone who had betrayed her. But he also felt pity for Iseult his wife, the beautiful

and simple. He had broken faith with both. ¶ Meanwhile, Iseult of the White Hand was surprised to hear him sigh as he lay beside her. At last she spoke, ashamed: ¶ "Dear lord, have I offended you in aught? Why do you not give me a single kiss? Tell me, that I may know my fault, and I will make you fair amends, if I can." ¶ "Dear one," said Tristram, "be not angry, but I have made a vow. In times past, in another land, I fought a dragon, and I was ready to perish, when I remembered the Mother of God; I promised her that if she would of her courtesy deliver me from the dragon, I would, if ever I took a wife, refrain for a whole year from her embraces." ¶ "Well then," said Iseult of the White Hand, "I will bear it as I may." ¶ But when in the morning her maidens put on her the habit of married women, she smiled sadly, thinking that she had no right to this adornment.

XVI. KAHERDIN



La dame chante dulcement
Sa voix accorde a l'estrument
Les mains sont beles, li lais bons
Dulce la voix et bas li tons

THOMAS THE RHYMER



FEW days later, Duke Hoël, his seneschal and all his huntsmen, Tristram, Iseult of the White Hand and Kaherdin came forth together from the castle to hunt in the wood. Tristram rode on the left of Kaherdin, who held the bridle of Iseult's palfrey with his right hand. Now it happened that the palfrey stumbled in a pool. His hoof spurted the water up under Iseult's garments so that she was all wet, and felt the cold higher than her knee. She uttered a little cry, and spurred her horse forward, laughing so loud and clear that Kaherdin, pricking after her and overtaking her, asked: ¶ "Fair sister, why dost thou laugh?" ¶ "Because of a thought that came to me, fair brother. When the water splashed up to me I said to it: 'Water, thou art bolder than the bold Tristram has ever been.' That was why I laughed. But I have already said too much, brother, and I regret it." ¶ Kaherdin, surprised, pressed her so hard that at last she told him the truth about her marriage. ¶ Then Tristram rejoined them, and all

three rode in silence to the hunting-lodge. There Kaherdin called Tristram to speak with him and said: ¶ "Sir Tristram, my sister has confessed the truth to me touching her marriage. I held you for my peer and comrade. But you have failed in your troth, and shamed my kindred. If you do not make amends to me, know that I defy you henceforth." ¶ Tristram answered: ¶ "Yes, I came among you to your misfortune. But know my misery, fair and gentle friend, my brother and comrade, and perchance thy heart will be softened towards me. Know that I have another Iseult, the fairest among women, who has suffered and still suffers many hard things for me. Certes, thy sister loves and honours me; but for love of me, the other Iseult treats even a dog that I gave her with greater honour than thy sister treats me. Come; leave the chase, and follow where I shall lead thee; I will tell thee the grief of my life." ¶ Tristram turned his bridle and spurred his horse, Kaherdin pressed forward in his track. Without a word, they hastened to the heart of the forest. There Tristram unfolded his whole life to Kaherdin. He told how he had drunk love and death upon the sea; he told of the treachery of the barons and the dwarf, of how the Queen was led to the pyre and given over to the lepers, he told of their loves in the wild forest; how he had given her back to

The Queen sings sweetly.

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King Mark, and how, having fled from her, he had desired to love Iseult of the White Hand, and how he knew now that henceforth he could neither live nor die without the Queen. ¶ Kaherdin held his peace in amazement. He felt that his anger was appeased in spite of himself. ¶ "Friend," he said at length, "I hear marvellous words, and you have moved my heart to pity; for you have suffered griefs from which may God protect us all! Return to Carhaix; on the third day from this I will, if I can, tell you my mind."

¶ In her chamber at Tintagel Iseult the fair sighs and calls on Tristram. She has no thought, no hope, no will but to love him always. All her desire is to him, and for two years she has heard nothing of him. Where is he? in what land? is he even alive? ¶ In her chamber Iseult the Fair sits and makes a sad love lay. She sings how Guron was surprised and killed for love of the lady he loved above all things, and how by a stratagem the Count gave Guron's heart to his wife to eat, and all her grief. ¶ The Queen sings sweetly; her voice is in harmony with the harp. The hands that touch the strings are fair, the lay is good, the tone low, and sweet the voice. ¶ Now presently came Kariado, a rich count from a distant isle. He had come to Tintagel to offer his service to the

Queen, and many times since Tristram's departure he had implored her love. But the Queen repulsed his prayer and treated it as folly. He was a goodly knight, proud and arrogant and fair of speech, but he was fitter for a lady's chamber than for a battle-field. He found Iseult singing her lay, and said, laughing: ¶ "Lady, what a mournful song, sad as that of the osprey. Do not men say that the osprey sings to herald death? It is my death, no doubt, that your lay foretells; for I die for love of you." ¶ "So be it," said Iseult. "I am well pleased that my song foretells your death, for never do you come hither without some doleful tidings. It is you who have always been the osprey or the screech-owl to speak evil of Tristram. What evil news do you bring me to-day?" ¶ Kariado answered: ¶ "Queen, you are angry and I know not why; but none save a fool would take your speech amiss! Whatever be the death which the osprey announces, here is the evil news that the screech-owl brings you. Tristram your friend is lost to you, Lady Iseult. He has taken a wife in another land. Henceforth you must look elsewhere, for he despises your love. He has taken to wife with great honour Iseult of the White Hand, daughter of the Duke of Brittany." ¶ Kariado went out in wrath. Iseult the Fair hung her head and began to weep. ¶ On the third day Kaherdin called Tristram:

¶ "Friend, I have taken counsel in my heart. If what you have told me is true, the life you lead in this land is madness and folly, and no good can come of it either for you or for my sister Iseult of the White Hand. Therefore hearken to my words. We will sail together to Tintagel; you shall see the Queen, and you will see if she still regrets you and keeps faith with you. If she has forgotten you, perchance then you will hold Iseult my sister, the fair, the simple, more dear. I will follow you; am I not your peer and comrade?" ¶ "Brother," said Tristram, "well has it been said that a man's heart is worth all the gold of a country." So presently Tristram and Kaherdin took the pilgrim's staff and cloak, as if they were about to visit holy bodies in distant lands. They bade farewell to Duke Hoël, Tristram took Gorvenal, and Kaherdin a single squire. In secret they equipped a vessel and set sail for Cornwall. ¶ The wind was light and favourable, and one morning before dawn they landed not far from Tintagel in a solitary creek, near to the Castle of Lidan. There, no doubt, Dinas of Lidan, the good seneschal, would shelter them and hide their coming. ¶ Early in the morning the two comrades went up towards Lidan, when they saw coming behind them a man who was taking the same road, walking his horse gently. They hurried into the thicket, but the man passed

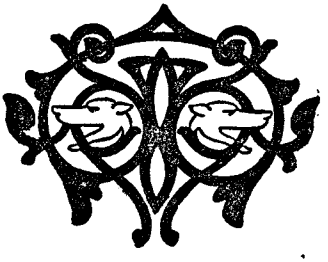
without seeing them, for he was dozing in the saddle. Tristram recognised him. ¶ "Brother," said he softly, "it is Dinas of Lidan himself. He sleeps. No doubt he is returning from his lady and he is still dreaming of her; it would not be courteous to awake him, but follow me at a distance. ¶ He came up with Dinas, took his horse gently by the bridle, and rode noiselessly beside him. At last the horse stumbled and awoke the sleeper. He opened his eyes, saw Tristram, hesitated, then cried: ¶ "It is thou, it is thou, Tristram! Blessed be the hour when I see thee again. I have waited long for it." ¶ "Friend, God save you! What news can you give me of the Queen?" ¶ "Alas! evil news. The King cherishes her and seeks to make her happy; but since thine exile she languishes and weeps for thee. Ah! why hast thou returned to her? Wouldst thou seek her death and thine own once more? Tristram, have pity on the Queen, leave her in peace." ¶ "Friend," said Tristram, "grant me one guerdon; hide me at Lidan, take my message to her, and let me see her once again, for the last time." ¶ Dinas replied: "I grieve for my lady, and I will not give her thy message unless I know that she is still dear to thee above all other ladies." ¶ "Ah! sir, tell her she is still dear to me above all other ladies, and it will be

King Mark and Iseult the Fair were seated at chess.
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truth." ¶ "Then follow me, Tristram; I will help thee in thy need." ¶ So the seneschal sheltered Tristram at Lidan, with Gorvenal, and Kaherdin and his squire, and when Tristram had told him the adventures of his life from point to point Dinas set out for Tintagel to get news of the court. He learnt that in three days' time Queen Iseult, King Mark and all his retinue, his squires, and his huntsmen, would leave Tintagel to visit the Castle of the White Plain, where a great hunt was to be held. Then Tristram gave the seneschal his green jasper ring and the message he was to take to the Queen.

XVII. DINAS OF LIDAN



Bele amie si est de nus ;
Ne vus sans mei, no je sans vus

MARIE DE FRANCE



INAS therefore returned to Tintagel, mounted the steps and entered the great hall. King Mark and Iseult the Fair were seated at chess under the daïs. Dinas placed himself on a stool near the Queen, as if to watch her play, and twice, feigning to point out the chessmen, he put his hand on the board; the second time, Iseult recognised the jasper ring on his finger. Then she could play no more. She pushed Dinas' arm slightly in such fashion that several of the pieces fell into disorder. ¶ "See, seneschal," she said, "you have disturbed my game and I cannot go on with it." ¶ Mark quitted the hall. Iseult withdrew to her chamber, and sent for the seneschal. ¶ "Friend, are you Tristram's messenger?" ¶ "Yes, Queen, he is at Lidan, hidden in my castle." ¶ Is it true that he hath taken a wife in Brittany?" ¶ "Queen, it is true. But he declares he has not betrayed you; that he has never for a single day ceased to love you above all women; that he will die unless he may see you once more; he implores you to grant him this, by

the promise you gave him the last time he spoke with you." ¶ The Queen was silent for a time, thinking of the other Iseult. At last she made answer: ¶ "Yes, the last time he spoke with me I remember that I said: If ever I see the green jasper ring, neither tower nor fortress nor royal command shall hinder me from doing the will of my beloved, be it folly or wisdom." ¶ "Queen, two days hence the court is to leave Tintagel and go to the White Plain. Tristram sends you word that he will be hidden on the road, in a thorn thicket. He begs you to have pity on him." ¶ "I have said: neither tower nor castle nor royal command shall hinder me from doing the will of my beloved." ¶ On the morrow, while all Mark's court made ready to leave Tintagel, Tristram and Gorvenal, Kaherdin and his squire donned their hauberks, took swords and shields, and set out by secret paths to the appointed place. Two roads led to the White Plain through the forest; one fair and well metalled, on which the procession was to pass, the other stony and deserted. On this Tristram and Kaherdin posted their two squires; they were to await them in this place, keeping their horses and their shields. They themselves crept through the bushes and hid in a thicket. On the road in front of this thicket Tristram laid a hazel branch entwined by a spray

of honeysuckle. ¶ Soon the cortège appeared upon the road. First came King Mark's troop. In fair array came the foragers and marshals, the cooks and cupbearers, the chaplains, the kennelmen leading greyhounds and bloodhounds, then the falconers, carrying the birds on their left wrists, then the huntsmen, then the knights, then the barons; they bear their little part, well arranged in pairs, and it is fair to see them richly mounted upon horses caparisoned with gold-embroidered velvet. Then King Mark passed by, and Kaherdin marvelled to see his henchmen round him two in front and two behind, all in cloth of gold or scarlet. ¶ Then the Queen's cortège advanced. First came the laundresses and chambermaids, then the wives and daughters of barons and counts. They pass one by one; a young knight escorts each. Finally a palfrey approaches ridden by the most beautiful creature Kaherdin has ever seen; she is well proportioned both in face and figure, hips a little low, eyebrows well marked, smiling eyes and small teeth; she is clad in a gown of red samite; a slender fillet of gold and precious stones adorns her smooth forehead. ¶ "It is the Queen," said Kaherdin in a low voice. ¶ "The Queen?" said Tristram; "no, it is her waiting-woman, Camilla." ¶ Then there comes on a grey horse another damsel whiter than snow in February, and

pinker than a rose; her clear eyes shine like stars in a fountain. ¶ "Now I see her, it is the Queen!" said Kaherdin. ¶ "Oh, no!" said Tristram, "it is Bragwaine the Faithful." ¶ Then the road grew bright suddenly, as if the sun had pierced through the foliage of the great trees, and Iseult the Fair appeared. Duke Andret, whom God confound, rode on her right. ¶ At this moment songs of linnets and of larks burst from the thicket, and Tristram put all his tenderness into these melodies. The Queen understood her lover's message. She noticed on the ground the hazel branch entwined with honeysuckle, and she thought in her heart: "Thus it is with us, beloved; neither thee without me nor I without thee." She checked her palfrey, dismounted and went towards a hackney which carried a kennel adorned with precious stones; there, on a rug of purple, lay the dog Petit-Crû; she took it in her arms, smoothed it with her hand, caressed it with her ermine mantle, and made much of it. Then, replacing it in its shrine, she turned to the thicket and said loudly: ¶ "Birds of the wood who have charmed me with your songs, I take you into my service. While my lord Mark is riding to the White Plain, I shall sojourn in my Castle of Saint Lubin. Birds, follow thither in my train; to-night I will reward you richly, like good minstrels." ¶ Tristram heard

her words and rejoiced. But Andret the felon was already disquieted. He lifted the Queen again into her saddle, and the train passed on. ¶ Now you must hear of an evil chance. While the royal cortège was passing along, an armed knight, Bleheri, appeared on the road where Gorvenal and Kaherdin's squire were guarding their lords' horses, He recognised Gorvenal and Tristram's shield from afar. "What do I see?" he thought; "it is Gorvenal and the other must be Tristram himself." He spurred his horse towards them and cried, "Tristram!" But the two squires had already turned their horses' heads, and fled. Bleheri galloped after them, repeating: ¶ "Tristram! halt, in the name of valour I conjure thee." ¶ But the squires turned not. Then Bleheri cried: ¶ "Tristram, hold, in the name of Iseult the Fair I conjure thee." ¶ Thrice he conjured the fugitives in the name of Iseult the Fair, but in vain; they disappeared and Bleheri only overtook one of their horses, which he carried off as his capture. He arrived at the Castle of Saint Lubin at the moment after the Queen had entered there. And having found her alone, he said: ¶ "Queen, Tristram is in this country. I saw him on the deserted road that comes from Tintagel. He took flight. Thrice I called upon him to halt, conjuring him in the name of Iseult the Fair; but he had taken fright, and he

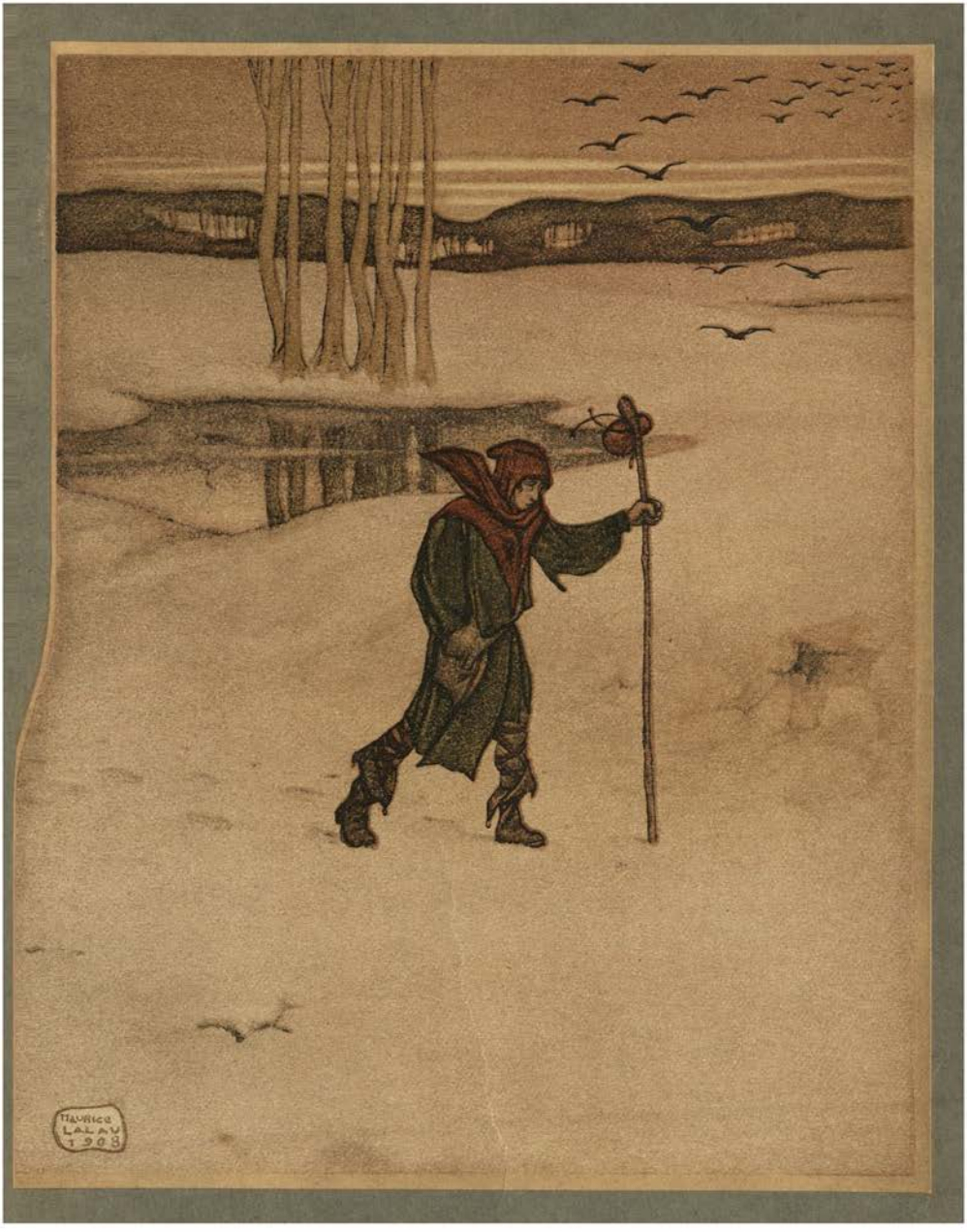
dared not wait for me." ¶ "Fair sir, what you say is folly and falsehood. How can Tristram be here? Why should he have fled from you? And would he not have halted if conjured in my name?" ¶ "Nevertheless, lady, I saw him, and in proof thereof I have taken one of his horses. Look, there it stands." ¶ But Bleheri saw that Iseult was angered, and it grieved him, for he loved her and Tristram. He left her, regretting that he had spoken. ¶ Then Iseult wept and said: "Woe is me, I have lived too long, since I have seen the day when Tristram mocks and shames me! What enemy would he not have defied of old, when conjured by my name? He is brave; if he fled before Bleheri, if he deigned not to hold at the name of his lady, it must be that the other Iseult possesses him. Why did he come back? He has betrayed me, and he wishes further to shame me. Have I not already suffered enough for him? Let him go back then, shamed in his turn, to Iseult of the White Hand." ¶ Then she called Perinis the Faithful, and told him the tidings Bleheri had brought. She added: ¶ "Friend, seek out Tristram on the deserted highway that leads from Tintagel to Saint Lubin. Tell him that I will not salute him, and that if he be so bold as to dare approach me, I will have him driven out by the guards and servants." ¶ Perinis set

out on the quest, and found Tristram and Kaherdin. He gave them the Queen's message. ¶ "Brother," cried Tristram, "what is this thou sayest? How could I have fled from Bleheri, since, as thou seest, we have not our horses? Gorvenal was keeping them, we found him not at the appointed place, and we are still seeking him." ¶ At this moment Gorvenal and Kaherdin's squire returned; they set forth their adventure. ¶ "Perinis, fair and dear friend," said Tristram, "return in all haste to thy lady. Tell her that I send her love and greeting, that I have not failed in the faith I owe her, that she is dear to me above all women; tell her to send thee back to me bearing her pardon; I will wait thy return here." ¶ So Perinis returned to the Queen, and told her what he had seen and heard. But she believed it not. ¶ "Ah! Perinis, thou wast my close and faithful servant, set apart by my father from thy childhood for my service. But the wizard Tristram has won thee with his lies and presents; begone!" ¶ Perinis knelt at her feet. ¶ "Lady, these be bitter words. Never have I felt such grief in my life. But I care little for myself. I grieve for you, lady, who do outrage my lord Tristram, and who will regret it when it is too late." ¶ "Begone, I believe thee not. Thou too, Perinis, Perinis the Faithful, thou too hast betrayed me!" ¶ On the morrow,

Tristram wrapped himself in a great ragged cloak. He painted his face in places with vermilion and walnut juice, so that he resembled a wretch devoured by leprosy. He took in his hands a wooden bowl for alms, and a leper's rattle. ¶ Then he came into the streets of Saint Lubin, and changing his voice, begged of all comers, desiring only that he might but see the Queen. ¶ Presently she came forth from the castle; Bragwaine and her women accompanied her, with guards and servants. She took the road that led to the church. The leper followed the servants, sounded his rattle, and begged in dolorous tones: ¶ "Queen, give me an alms; you know not how needy I am." ¶ Iseult recognised him by his fair body and his stature. She trembled, but deigned not to look at him. The leper implored her, and it was pitiful to hear him; he dragged himself along the ground after her. ¶ "Queen, if I dare approach you, be not angry; have mercy on me. I have deserved it." ¶ But the Queen called her guards and servants: ¶ "Drive away this beggar," she said. ¶ The servants drove him off and beat him. He resisted them and cried: ¶ "Queen, have pity." ¶ Then Iseult laughed aloud. She was still laughing when she entered the church. When he heard her laughter, the leper went away. The

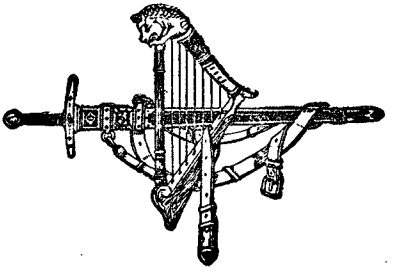
Tristram disguised himself as a beggar.

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Queen advanced a few paces up the aisle of the church; then her limbs failed her; she fell to her knees, her face on the ground, her arms outstretched. ¶ On that same day Tristram took leave of Dinas in such discomfiture that he seemed to have lost his senses, and his ship set sail for Brittany. ¶ Alas! very soon the Queen repented her! When she heard from Dinas of Lidan that Tristram had gone in such bitter sorrow, she began to think that Perinis had told her the truth; that Tristram had not fled when conjured in her name to halt; and that she had done him a great wrong in driving him away. "What!" she thought, "I drove you away, you, Tristram, my beloved. Never will you know of my repentance, nor what a chastisement I will impose on myself as a small token of my remorse." ¶ From that day forth, to punish herself for her error and her folly, Iseult the Fair wore a hair-shirt against her skin.

XVIII. TRISTRAM'S MADNESS



El beivre ſu la nostre mort

THOMAS



RISTRAM came again to Brittany, to Carhaix, to Duke Hoël, and his wife Iseult of the White Hand. All welcomed him, but Iseult the Fair had driven him away; nothing else was of moment to him. Long he languished far from her, till one day he thought that he would see her again, even if she should once more cause him to be shamefully beaten by her guards and servants. Far from her, he knew that his death would be sure if lingering; it were better to die of a blow than to perish slowly day by day. He who lives always in pain is no better than a dead man. Tristram desired death, he longed for it; but he would have had the Queen know that he died for love of her; he would die more peacefully if she could learn this. ¶ He left Carhaix without a word to any one, either kinsfolk or friends or even Kaherdin, his dear comrade. He set out poorly clad and on foot; for none take note of the poor beggars who tramp along the high roads. He walked till he came to the sea coast. ¶ In the port a great merchant ship was making ready;

the sailors were already bending the sails and hauling up the anchor to make for the open sea. ¶ "God keep you, gentlemen, and may your voyage be prosperous. Whither do you sail?" ¶ "To Tintagel." ¶ "To Tintagel! Ah, sirs, take me with you." ¶ He embarked. A favourable wind swelled the sails, the vessel flew over the waves. Five days and five nights she sailed straight for Cornwall, and on the sixth day cast anchor in the port of Tintagel. ¶ Above the port the castle rose over the sea, well enclosed on every side. The only entrance was by one iron door, and two guards kept it day and night. How was he to get in? ¶ Tristram left the ship and sat down on the shore. He learnt from a passer-by that Mark was at the castle, and that he had just held a great court there. ¶ "But where is the Queen? and Bragwaine, her fair waiting-woman?" ¶ "They too are at Tintagel, and I saw them lately. Queen Iseult seemed sad as is her wont." ¶ At the name of Iseult, Tristram sighed, and thought that neither valour nor cunning would help him to see his beloved again: for King Mark would kill him. ¶ "But what matters it if he slay me? Iseult, should I not die for love of thee? And what do I daily but die? And you, Iseult, if you knew me to be here, would you even deign to speak to your lover? would you not order me to

be driven away by your guards? Yes, I will essay an artifice. I will disguise myself as a fool, and this folly will be great wisdom. He who will be less wise than I will hold me for a fool; he who will have one madder than I in his own house will think me mad." ¶ A fisherman came by, clad in a tunic of rough frieze with a large hood. Tristram made a sign to him, and took him apart: ¶ "Friend, wilt thou change thy clothes for mine? Give me thy coat, it pleases me well." ¶ The fisherman looked at Tristram's garments, thought them better than his own, took them at once and went off quickly, pleased with the exchange. ¶ Then Tristram cut his fair hair close to his head and fashioned a cross in it. He smeared his face with the juice of a magic herb brought from his own country, and immediately his complexion and aspect were so changed that no one in the whole world could have recognised him. He pulled a chestnut sapling from a hedge, made himself a club and hung it round his neck; then with bare feet he went up boldly to the castle. ¶ The porter thought certainly that he was a madman, and said to him: ¶ "Come hither; where hast thou been so long?" ¶ Tristram altered his voice and answered: ¶ "At the wedding of the Abbot of St. Michael's Mount, who is my friend. He has espoused an abbess, a portly lady in a veil. From

Besançon to the Mount, all priests, abbots, monks, and clerks were bidden to the nuptials; and all, bearing staves and croziers, jump, play, and dance in the shade of the great trees. But I left them to come hither; for I am to serve at the King's table to-day." ¶ The porter said to him: "Enter then, my lord, son of Urgan the Hairy; you are tall and hairy and like to your father." ¶ When he entered the courtyard swinging his club, the grooms and servants crowded round him, chasing him like a wolf: ¶ "Look at the fool! hi, hi, hi!" ¶ They threw stones at him and struck at him with their sticks; but he defended himself, leaping and gambolling, and let them do their will; when he was attacked on the left, he turned, and dealt blows to the right. ¶ In the midst of shouts and laughter, drawing the excited rabble after him, he came to the threshold of the great hall, where King Mark was seated beside the Queen under the daïs. He approached the door, slung the club round his neck and entered. The King saw him and said: ¶ "This is a lusty fellow, let him come hither." ¶ They brought him forward, the club hanging from his neck. ¶ "Friend, be welcome." ¶ Tristram replied in his feigned voice: ¶ "Sire, best and noblest of kings, I knew that your heart would melt with pity at the sight of me. God protect you, fair sir." ¶ "Friend, what

seekest thou here?" ¶ "Iseult, whom I have so greatly loved. I have a sister whom I bring to you, the fair Brunhilda. You are weary of the Queen, try this other. Let us make an exchange, I will give you my sister, grant me Iseult, I will take her and will serve you for love." ¶ The King laughed and said to the fool: ¶ "If I give thee the Queen, what wilt thou do with her? Whither wilt thou take her?" ¶ "Up above; between the sky and the clouds, in my fair house of glass. The sunbeams pass through it, the winds cannot shake it; I will bring the Queen there to a crystal chamber decked with roses, all radiant in the morning when the sun strikes on it." ¶ The King and the barons said to each other: ¶ "This is a good fool, skilled in speech." ¶ He was seated on a carpet gazing tenderly at Iseult. ¶ "Friend," said Mark, "what hope canst thou have that my lady will take heed of a hideous fool like thee?" ¶ "Sire, it is my right; I have done much labour for her sake, and it was because of her that I lost my wits." ¶ "Who art thou then?" ¶ "I am Tristram, he who loved the Queen so dearly, and who will love her till he dies." ¶ At this name Iseult sighed, changed colour, and said angrily: ¶ "Begone! what brought thee here? Begone, wretched fool." ¶ The fool noted her anger and said: ¶ "Queen

Iseult, do you not remember the day when pierced by Marhaus' poisoned blade, and bearing my harp across the seas, I was borne to your shores. You healed me. Have you forgotten this, O Queen?" ¶ Iseult replied: ¶ "Get thee hence, fool; thy follies please me not, nor dost thou." ¶ Then the fool turned at once to the barons, and drove them towards the door, crying: ¶ "Madmen all, away! Leave me alone to hold counsel with Iseult; for I came hither to love her." ¶ The King laughed, Iseult blushed. ¶ "Sire, drive this fool away." ¶ But the fool replied in his strange voice: ¶ "Queen Iseult, do you not remember the great dragon I killed in your land? I hid his tongue in my hose, and seared by the venom, I fell near the marsh. I was then a marvellous knight, and I was at the point of death when you succoured me." ¶ Then Iseult answered: ¶ "Silence, thou shamest knighthood, for thou art a born fool. Cursed be the mariners who brought thee hither, instead of throwing thee into the sea." ¶ The fool burst out laughing and continued: ¶ Queen Iseult, do you not remember the bath where you were about to kill me with my own sword? and the story of the Golden Hair which appeased your wrath? and how I defended you against the cowardly seneschal?" ¶ "Silence, evil dreamer. Why come you here to babble of your dreams?

You were drunk last night, no doubt, and these are the dreams of your drunkenness." ¶ "It is true. I am drunken, and with such a drink that my drunkenness will never pass. Queen Iseult, do you not remember that fair, warm day upon the high seas? You were thirsty, do you not remember, daughter of kings? we both drank from the same goblet. Since then I have always been drunk with an evil drunkenness." ¶ When Iseult heard these words that she alone could understand, she hid her head in her mantle, rose, and would have left the hall. But the King held her back by her ermine cape, and made her sit down again at his side. ¶ "Wait a while, Iseult my beloved, let us hear this folly to the end. Fool, what is now thy calling?" ¶ "I have served kings and counts." ¶ "Truly, canst thou hunt with hounds, and with hawks?" ¶ "Certes, when it pleases me to hunt in the forest, I can take the cranes that fly in the clouds with my greyhounds; and with my bloodhounds, swans and grey or white geese, and wild pigeons; with my bow, divers and bustards!" ¶ All laughed heartily, and the King asked: ¶ "And what dost thou take, brother, when thou seekest spoil in the river?" ¶ "I take all that I find; with my kites, wolves and great bears; with my gerfalcons, wild boars; with my hawks, harts and

roes; foxes with my falcons, hares with my merlins. And when I come back to my protector, I can wield the club, and divide the faggots among the grooms, and tune my harp and sing, and love fair queens, and throw well-cut chips into the brooks. Truly, am not I a good minstrel? You have seen to-day how I can wield my staff." ¶ And he laid about him with his club, crying: ¶ "Away, my lords of Cornwall! Why do you linger here? Have you not eaten? are you not full?" ¶ The King, having thus diverted himself with the fool, ordered his horse and his falcons and went out to hunt with his knights and squires. ¶ "Sire," said Iseult, "I am weary and sorrowful. Permit me to go and rest in my chamber. I cannot listen any longer to this folly." ¶ She went pensive to her chamber, seated herself on her bed and made great lamentation. ¶ "Woe is me, why was I born? My heart is sore and heavy. Bragwaine, dear sister, my life is so hard and bitter that I would fain die. There is a fool below, with his hair cut in the form of a cross, who came hither in an evil hour. This fool or minstrel is a wizard, for he knows all my life and my history from point to point; he knows things that are known to none but you and me and Tristram; this beggar knows them by sorcery or enchantment." ¶ Bragwaine answered: ¶ "May it not be Tristram

himself?" ¶ "No, for Tristram is goodly and the noblest of knights; but this man is hideous and deformed. Cursed be he of God; cursed be the hour when he was born, and cursed the ship that bore him hither instead of drowning him in the deep waters of the open sea." ¶ "Calm yourself, my lady," said Bragwaine. "You are too apt to curse and to excommunicate in these days. Where did you learn this trade? Perhaps this man may be a messenger from Tristram?" ¶ "I think not so, I did not recognise him. But go and find him, fair friend, speak to him, see if you recognise him." ¶ Bragwaine went to the hall where the fool had been left alone, seated on a bench. Tristram recognised her, dropped his club and said: ¶ "Bragwaine, dear Bragwaine, I conjure you by God, have pity on me!" ¶ "Vile fool, whence knowest thou my name?" ¶ "Fair one, I have known it long. By my head which was once fair, if reason no longer dwells in that head, you are the cause. Was it not you who should have guarded the philtre I drank upon the high seas? I drank in the great heat from a silver goblet, and I handed it to Iseult. You alone knew it, fair one; do you not remember?" ¶ "No," replied Bragwaine, much troubled, and she hastened back to Iseult's chamber. But the fool ran after her, crying, "Have pity!" ¶ He enters, sees Iseult,

bounds towards her with outstretched arms, eager to clasp her to his breast; but she, ashamed, and moist with a sweat of anguish, draws back and evades him. Seeing that she shrank from his touch, Tristram trembles with shame and anger, and draws back against the wall, near to the door, and in his feigned voice he speaks: ¶ "Truly, I have lived too long, since I have seen the day when Iseult repulses me, does not deign to love me, accounts me vile. Ah! Iseult, slowly forgets he who loves well. Iseult, a fair and precious thing is an abundant spring that gushes out in a full clear stream; when it dries up, it is worth nothing. So is it with a love that fails." ¶ Iseult made answer: ¶ "Brother, I behold you, I doubt, I tremble, I know not, I do not recognise Tristram." ¶ "Queen Iseult, I am Tristram, he who loved you so truly. Do you not remember the dwarf who strewed the flour between our beds? and the leap I made, and how the blood flowed from my wound? and the gift that I sent you, the dog Petit-Crû with the magic bell? Do you not remember the pieces of wood I cut and threw in the stream?" ¶ Iseult looked at him, sighed, and knew not what to do or say; she saw that he knew everything, but thought it would be folly to confess that he was Tristram. Then Tristram said: ¶ "My Queen and lady, I know that you

shrink from me and I accuse you of treachery. Yet I have known days when you loved me well. It was in the deep forest, under the bower of foliage? Do you remember the day I gave you my dog, Husdent? Ah! he always loved me, and for me he would leave even Iseult the Fair. Where is he? What have you done with him? He at least would know me." ¶ "He would know you? You speak foolishly, for since Tristram departed, he lies all day in his kennel, and springs upon any man who dares approach him. Bragwaine, bring him to me." ¶ Bragwaine brought him. ¶ "Come hither, Husdent," said Tristram; thou wert mine, I claim thee again." ¶ When Husdent heard his voice, he snatched his leash from Bragwaine's hands, ran to his master, rolled at his feet, licked his hands, and barked for joy. ¶ "Husdent!" cried the fool, "Husdent, blessings on the care I gave to the rearing of thee! Thou givest me a warmer welcome than she whom I loved so dearly. She will not recognise me. Will she even recognise this ring that she gave me with tears and kisses the day we parted? This little jasper ring has never left me. Often I asked counsel of it in my grief, often I watered this green stone with my hot tears." ¶ Iseult saw the ring. She opened her arms. ¶ "Here am I. Take me, Tristram!" ¶ Then Tristram ceased to

speak in a feigned voice. ¶ "Beloved, how could you have been so long to recognise me, longer than the dog here? What matters the ring? Do you not feel that it would have been sweeter to have been remembered at the recital of our past loves? What is the sound of my voice to thee? It is the sound of my heart that thou shouldst hear." ¶ "Beloved," said Iseult, "I heard it perchance sooner than thou thinkest; but there are cunning eyes and ears around us. Should I have followed my desire like this dog, at the risk of causing thee to be taken and slain before mine eyes? I kept watch for thee and for me. Neither the tale of our past lives, nor the sound of thy voice, nor even this ring could prove aught, for they might be the evil devices of a wizard. Nevertheless, I yield at the sight of the ring, for did I not swear that when I saw it again, even if I should perish, I would do thy commands, were they wisdom or folly. Wisdom or folly, here am I; take me, Tristram." ¶ She fell swooning on her lover's breast. When she came to herself, Tristram held her in his arms, and kissed her eyes and her face. He passed with her behind the curtain. In his arms he clasped the Queen.

¶ The varlets kept the fool for their amusement on the steps of the hall, like a dog in a kennel.

He bore their jests and blows patiently, for sometimes, restored to his own shape and comeliness, he passed from his lair to the Queen's chamber. ¶ But when some days had passed, two of the serving-maids suspected the fraud. They warned Andret, who placed three spies well armed at the door of the women's chambers. When Tristram would have entered they cried: ¶ "Back, fool, return to thy bundle of straw." ¶ "What! fair gentlemen," said the fool, "must I not go this evening to embrace the Queen? Know you not that she loves me?" ¶ Tristram brandished his club. They were afraid, and let him enter. He took Iseult in his arms: ¶ "Beloved, I must fly, for soon I shall be discovered. I must fly, and doubtless I shall never return here more. But my death is nigh; without thee I shall die of my desire." ¶ "Beloved, close thine arms, and clasp me so closely that our hearts may break in this embrace and our souls may go hence. Take me to the Fortunate Land of which thou toldst me of yore; the land whence none return, where skilful minstrels sing songs that have no end. Take me thither." ¶ "Yes, I will take thee to the Fortunate Land of the Living. The time is at hand; have we not tasted all misery and all joy? The time is at hand. When it is accomplished, if I call thee, Iseult, wilt thou come?" ¶ "Beloved, call

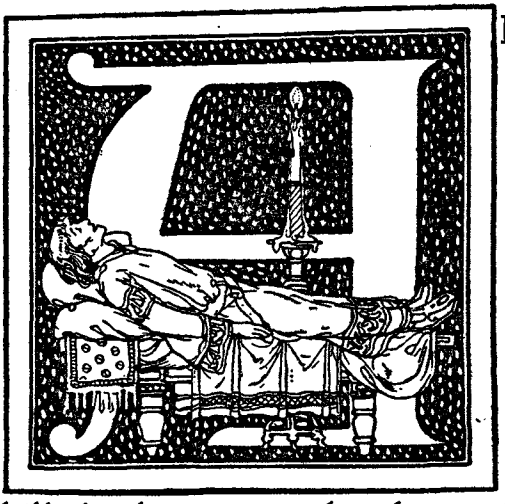
me! Thou knowest I will come." ¶ "Beloved, may God reward thee?" ¶ When he passed the threshold, the spies fell upon him. But the fool laughed aloud, swung his club and cried: ¶ "You drive me away, fair sirs. To what end? I have naught to do here henceforth, for my lady has sent me to prepare the bright house I promised her, the crystal house decked with roses, and radiant in the morning when the sun shines through it." ¶ "Be off then, fool, and curses on thee." ¶ The servants made way, and the fool, without haste, went away dancing.

XIX. DEATH OF TRISTRAM AND ISEULT



Amor condusse noi ad una morte

DANTE, *INFERNO*, c. v.



FTER he had returned to Carhaix in Brittany it fell out that Tristram fought against a baron named Bedalis on behalf of his dear comrade, Kaherdin. He fell into an ambush prepared by Bedalis and his brothers. Tristram killed the seven brothers, but he himself was wounded with a lance, and the lance was poisoned. ¶ He came back with great difficulty to the Castle of Carhaix, and caused his wounds to be dressed. The doctors came in great numbers, but none could cure the poison, for they did not even discover it. They used no plasters to draw the poison out; it was in vain that they beat and ground their roots, gathered their herbs and compounded potions. Tristram grew worse, the poison spread through his body, he became livid, and his bones began to show through his skin. ¶ He felt his life ebbing away, he knew that he must die. Then he longed to see Iseult the Fair. But how could he go to her? He was so weak that the sea would have killed him, and even could he have got to Cornwall, how would he have escaped his enemies there?

He made lament, the poison worked in his body, he waited for death. ¶ He sent secretly for Kaherdin to tell him his grief, for they loved each other with a loyal love. He would have no one in his chamber but Kaherdin, and would not even suffer any one in the adjoining rooms. His wife Iseult marvelled in her heart at this strange fancy. She came outside and leant against the wall that was behind Tristram's bed. There she listened; one of her most faithful attendants watched outside that none might surprise her. ¶ Tristram, gathering all his strength, sat up, leaning against the wall. Kaherdin sat beside him, and both wept, tenderly. They wept for their good comradeship, so soon broken, their great friendship and their love; and each lamented for the other. ¶ "Fair and gentle friend," said Tristram, "I am in a strange land, where I have no kinsman and no friend save you; you alone have offered me joy and solace in this land. I am dying, and I desire greatly to see Iseult the Fair. But how, by what device can I let her know my necessity? Ah! if I had a messenger who would go to her she would come, so dearly does she love me. Kaherdin, dear comrade, by our friendship, by your noble heart, by our comradeship, I implore you; essay this adventure for me, and if you take my message, I will be your liegeman and I will love you above

all men." ¶ Kaherdin saw Tristram weep, and lament, and despair; his heart melted with tenderness; he answered gently, for the love he bore him: ¶ "Fair comrade, weep no more; I will do your will. Certes, friend, for love of you I will brave death. No distress nor anguish shall prevent me from doing all in my power. Tell me what I shall say to the Queen, and I will prepare for the voyage." ¶ Tristram answered: "Friend, I thank thee. Now hear my prayer. Take this ring; it is a token between her and me. And when you come to her country, go to the court in the guise of a merchant. Offer her pieces of silk and show her this ring; she will at once find a means of speaking to you secretly. Then tell her that my heart greets her; and she alone can bring me comfort; tell her that if she comes not, I shall die; tell her to remember our past pleasures and our great sufferings and sorrows, and our joys, and the sweets of our loyal and tender love; let her remember the philtre we drank together on the sea; ah! it was death that we drank! Let her remember the vow I made never to love any save her; I have kept that promise." ¶ Behind the wall, Iseult of the White Hand heard these words, and was ready to swoon. ¶ "Hasten, comrade, and come back soon to me; if you linger, you will see me no more. Take a term of

forty days and bring back Iseult the Fair. Hide your departure from your sister, or tell her that you are going in search of a leech. Take my fair ship, and take with you two sails, one white and the other black. If you bring back Iseult the Queen, hoist the white sail when you return; and if you bring her not, journey with the black sail. Friend, I have no more to say. May God keep you and bring you back safe and sound." ¶ He sighed, wept and lamented, and Kaherdin wept also, kissed Tristram, and departed. ¶ He put to sea with the first wind. The mariners hauled up the anchors, bent their sails, flew before a light wind, and their prow cut through the high deep waves. They took rich merchandise with them; silken cloths dyed with rare colours, fine pottery from Tours, wines from Poitou, gerfalcons from Spain, and by this device Kaherdin hoped to get access to Iseult. Eight days and eight nights they breasted the waves, and came with full sail to Cornwall. ¶ A woman's wrath is a terrible thing, let each man beware of it. There, where she has loved best, will a woman avenge herself most cruelly. The love of women comes swiftly, and swiftly comes their hate; their enmity, once it has come, lasts longer than their friendship. They can restrain their love, but not their hate. Standing against the wall,

Iseult of the White Hand had heard every word. She had loved Tristram so dearly! . . . and at last she knew of his love for another. She remembered all she had heard. If she should be able, how will she be avenged some day upon him she loves best in the world! Nevertheless, she dissembled, and when the doors were opened again she entered Tristram's chamber, and hiding her wrath, she continued to serve and cherish him in loving fashion. She spoke to him gently, kissed him on the lips, and asked if Kaherdin would soon come back with the leech to cure him. . . . But all the time she pondered her vengeance. ¶ Kaherdin held on his course till he dropped anchor in the port of Tintagel. He took a large falcon on his wrist, a cloth of rare colour, and a finely chased goblet. He presented these to King Mark, and begged him courteously for safeguard and peace, that he might traffic in his domain without fear of chamberlain or viscount. And the King granted him his request before all the men of his palace. ¶ Then Kaherdin offered the Queen a golden clasp finely chased. ¶ "Queen," said he, "the gold is good"; and drawing Tristram's ring from his finger, he placed it beside the jewel. "Behold, Queen, the gold of the clasp is richer, yet the gold of this ring is also of price." ¶ When Iseult recognised the jasper ring her heart beat and her

colour changed, and fearing what she was about to hear, she drew Kaherdin aside to a casement, as if to see better, and to bargain for the ring. Kaherdin said quickly: ¶ "Lady, Tristram lies wounded by a poisoned blade, and he is nigh unto death. He sends you word that you alone can bring comfort to him. He reminds you of the grief and pains you suffered together. Keep the ring, he sends it to you." ¶ Iseult answered faintly: ¶ "Friend, I will follow you. Let your ship be ready to sail to-morrow morning." ¶ On the morrow in the morning, the Queen said she would go hawking, and ordered her birds and dogs to be got ready. But Duke Andret, who watched her continually, went with her. When they were in the fields, not far from the sea-shore, a pheasant rose. Andret loosed a falcon in pursuit of it, but the weather was clear and fine, the falcon took flight and disappeared. ¶ "See, Sir Andret," said the Queen, the falcon has perched over there in the port, on the mast of a ship I know not. Whose is this vessel?" ¶ "Lady," said Andret, "it is the ship of that merchant from Brittany who gave you the golden clasp yesterday. Let us go and claim our falcon." ¶ Kaherdin had placed a plank like a footbridge from his ship to the shore. He came to meet the Queen. ¶ "Lady, may it please you to enter my ship, and I will show you my rich

merchandise." ¶ "Willingly, sir," said the Queen. ¶ She dismounted, went straight to the plank. crossed it, and entered the ship. Andret was about to follow her, and set foot on the plank; but Kaherdin, standing on the bulwark, struck at him with an oar; Andret staggered and fell into the sea. He tried to recover himself; but Kaherdin beat him down under the water, crying: ¶ "Die, traitor! This is thy reward for all the evil thou hast brought upon Tristram and Queen Iseult." ¶ Thus God avenged the lovers on the felons who had hated them. All four were dead: Guenelon, Gondoïne, Denoalen, and Andret. ¶ The anchor was weighed, the mast set, the sail bent. The fresh breeze of morning rustled in the rigging and swelled the sails. Out of the port, towards the open sea, all white and luminous in the distance under the sunbeams, darted the vessel. ¶ At Carhaix Tristram languished. He yearned for the coming of Iseult. Nothing comforted him, and if he still lived it was because he waited for her. Every day he sent to the shore to see if the vessel were in sight, and of what colour was her sail; his heart had no other desires. Presently he caused himself to be carried upon the cliff at Penmarch, and as long as the sun showed above the horizon, he looked out seawards. ¶ Now hearken, gentles, to a dolorous adventure, pitiable

to all who love. Iseult was drawing near; the cliffs of Penmarch were already seen from the vessel, and she bounded forward joyously. Then a storm-wind rose suddenly, struck the sail full, and swept the vessel round. The mariners ran to the luff, and went about against their will. The wind howled, the deep waves surged round them, the air was thick and dark, the sea grew black, the rain burst over them in squalls. Rigging and bowlines cracked, the sailors hauled in the sail and drifted at the will of wind and water. They had unhappily forgotten to hoist up the boat that was made fast to the poop, and followed in the wake of the vessel. A wave broke over it and carried it away. ¶ Iseult cried aloud: ¶ "Alas! woe is me! God will not permit me to live long enough to see Tristram once again; it is His will that I should be drowned in this sea. Tristram, had I but once more spoken with thee, I would have cared little that I should die thereafter. Beloved, if I come not to thee, it is because God wills it so, and this is the greatest of my griefs. My death is nothing to me; since God desires it, I accept it; but beloved, when thou learnest it, thou wilt die, I know. Our love is such that thou canst not die without me, nor I without thee. I see thy death before me at the same time as my own. Alas! beloved, my desire is not to be

granted me; it was to die in thine arms, and to be buried in thy coffin. But this is denied us. I am about to die, and to disappear into the waters without thee. Perhaps thou wilt never know of my death, thou wilt live on, waiting always for my coming. If it be God's will, thou mayest even recover. . . . Ah! and perhaps thou mayest love another woman, thou mayest love Iseult of the White Hand. I know not how it will be with thee; as for me, beloved, if I knew thee dead, I would not live thereafter. God grant, beloved, either that I heal thee, or that we both die of the same pang." ¶ Thus did the Queen lament as long as the tempest lasted. But after five days the storm abated. High on the mast Kaherdin hoisted the white sail, that Tristram might see the colour from afar. Already Kaherdin sees the shores of Brittany. Alas! a calm came on immediately after the storm, the sea became smooth and quiet, the wind ceased to swell the sails, the mariners drifted vainly up and down, backwards and forwards. They saw the coast from afar, but the storm had carried off their boat, so that they could not land. On the third night Iseult dreamt that she held in her lap the head of a great wild boar which stained her robe with blood, and she knew by this token that she should see her lover no more. ¶ Tristram was too weak now

to watch from the cliffs of Penmarch, and all the long days he lay in his chamber far from the shore, he wept for Iseult who came not. Faint and weary, he sighed, lamented, and tossed on his couch; he seemed like to die of his yearning. ¶ At last the wind freshened, and the white sail appeared. Then Iseult of the White Hand avenged herself. ¶ She came to Tristram's bedside and said: "Beloved, Kaherdin comes. I have seen his ship on the sea; it is making slowly for the shore; but I recognised it; may it bring you healing." ¶ Tristram trembled. "Fair wife, are you sure it is his ship? Tell me what like is the sail?" ¶ "I saw it well, they have hoisted it high and spread it wide, for there is little wind. It is all black." ¶ Then Tristram turned his face to the wall and said: "I can live no longer." He repeated thrice "Iseult, beloved," and the fourth time he gave up the ghost. ¶ Then throughout the house the knights, Tristram's comrades, wept and bewailed him. They took him from his bed, laid him on a rich carpet, and wrapped his body in a winding-sheet.

¶ On the sea the wind had risen and filled the sail. It bore the ship to land. Iseult the Fair disembarked. She heard wailing in the streets, and bells tolling from chapels and monasteries. She asked the country people the meaning

She gave up the ghost and died beside him for grief.
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of these bells and tears. ¶ An old man answered her: ¶ "Lady, we are in great grief, Tristram, the free and valiant knight, is dead. He was generous to the poor, helpful to the suffering. It is the worst disaster that has ever befallen this land." ¶ Iseult heard, and she could not utter a word. She went up to the palace, passing through the street with her bodice unlaced. The Bretons marvelled as they looked at her. Never had they seen so fair a lady. Who was she? Whither was she going? ¶ Iseult of the White Hand, distracted by the evil she had wrought, hung over Tristram's body, uttering loud cries. The other Iseult entered and said to her: ¶ "Lady, rise, and let me come near. Believe me, I have a greater right to weep for him than you; I loved him more." ¶ She turned towards the east and prayed to God. Then she uncovered the body a little, and laid down beside her lover, kissed him on the mouth and cheeks and clasped him closely in her arms; mouth to mouth and body to body, she gave up the ghost and died beside him for grief. ¶ When King Mark heard of the death of the lovers, he crossed the seas, and coming to Brittany, he caused two coffins to be fashioned, one of chalcedony for Iseult, the other of beryl for Tristram. He carried their beloved bodies back with him in his ship to Tintagel. Near to a chapel,

right and left of the apse, he buried them in two tombs. But during the night, a green and leafy brier with strong shoots and perfumed flowers grew up from Tristram's tomb, and rising over the chapel, struck into Iseult's grave. The country people cut down the brier, but on the morrow it sprang up again, green and blooming and vigorous as before, and once more thrust itself into the bed of Iseult the Fair. Thrice they essayed to destroy it, but in vain. Finally, they told King Mark of the miracle, and he forbade them to cut down the brier henceforth.

¶ Gentles, the good trouvères of olden times, Béroul, and Thomas and Eilhart and Master Gottfried, told this tale for all those who love, and not for others. They give you greeting by me. They greet those who are pensive and those who are happy, the dissatisfied and the desirous, those who are joyous and those who are troubled, all lovers whatsoever. May they find here consolation for unfaithfulness, injustice, despite, and grief, for all the woes of love!

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